Everybody's

NUMBER FIVE MAY, 1925 VOLUME FIFTY-TWO

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

(See important Publisher's Announcement on page 181)

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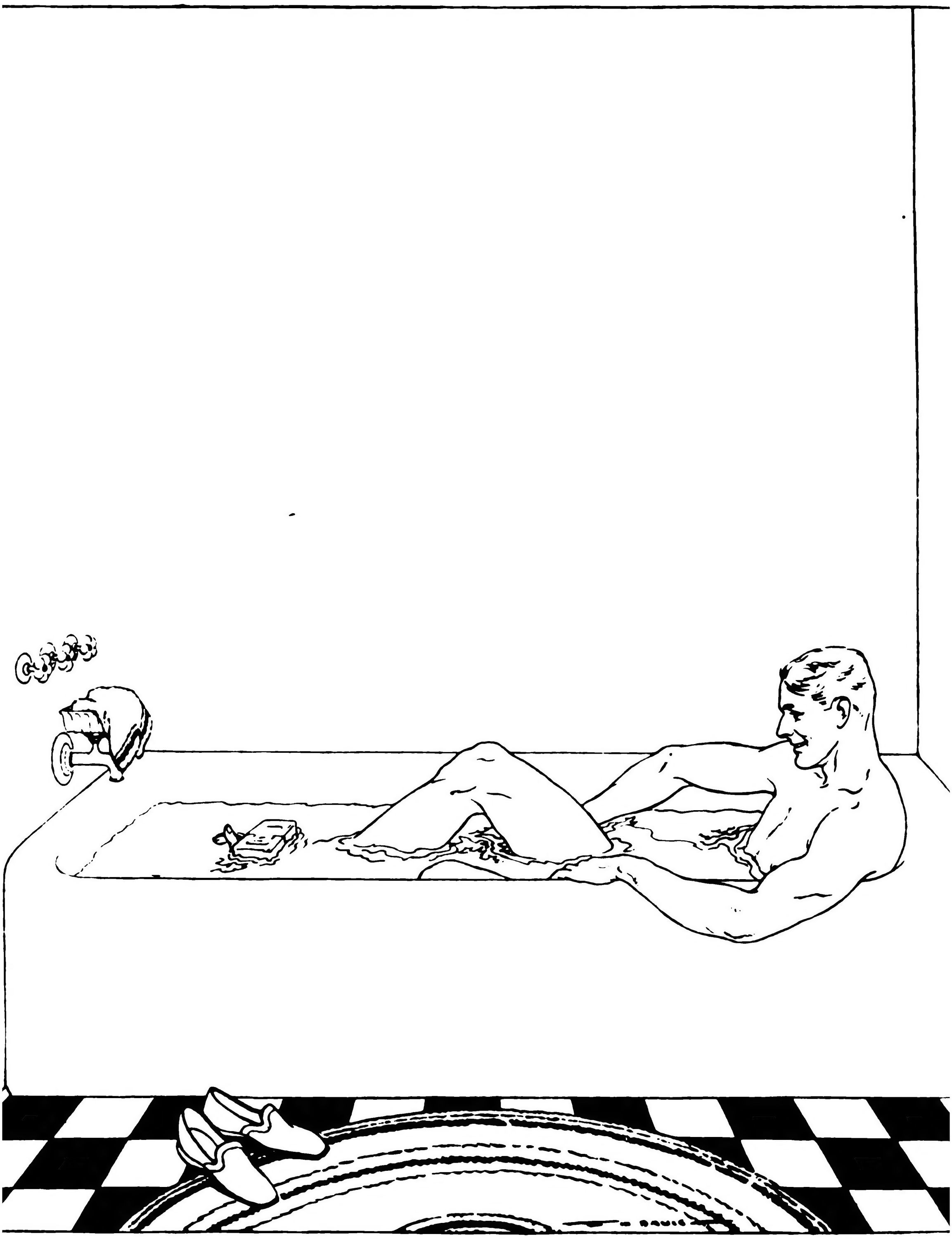

GENTLEMEN BATHERS
it floats!

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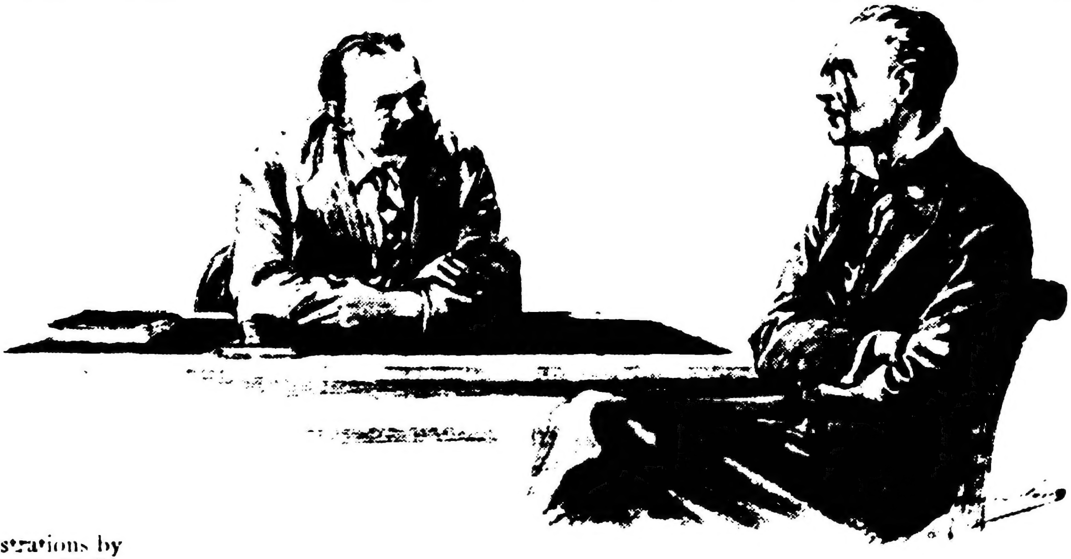
Advertising section continued in rear of book

Everybody's

VOL. 52, NO. 5 MAY, 1925 SEWELL HAGGARD, EDITOR



Illustrations by
John R Neill

Insure Love? Why Not?

A Life Policy

Harold Parsons Discovers an Inexpensive Way of Guaranteeing His Wife's Affection

By Roland Pertwee

THIS is the story of an agent in an insurance company or an assurance company, for I don't know which is which and anyway it doesn't matter.

His name was Harold Parsons and he was quite an ordinary young man, neither better nor worse than his fellows. The firm, trust, corporation or company for which he worked esteemed him as a good and faithful servant who never restricted his labors to the nine o'clock to six o'clock hours of business. He did not leave duty behind at the close of the day, as do some men; he bore it with him wrapped up in geniality and smiles and hail-fellow-well-met phrases. Being possessed of good sense and understanding he realized that the finest trade coups were often to be made when the world had its guard down and its napkins spread. At the hour for gin and bitters men became unwary and susceptible to specious argument. At the dinner table ladies are liable to discuss unhappy losses of jewelry, furs and such. Motorists, passengers in trains, those contemplating adventurous travel by air and confronted with gloomy fears of possible disaster, found Harold Parsons the very fellow to consult. To ventilate all the avenues of safeguard to the bodies, possessions, heirs and assigns of his numerous clients would be tedious and profitless. Suffice it is to say this energetic young man thought of everything and preached the letter of his thoughts to those who sought his counsel willingly—or heard it accidentally—and even to those who took pains to avoid hearing anything about it at all, and when he was not at business he talked business—and talked. In some walks of life this practice of carrying shop into the home is considered rather bad form. Not so in the insurance world, nor, for that matter, in the assurance world either.

Harold Parsons was an angel of the Corps of Safety First, a professor of precaution, a caretaker of the present and the future.

It will be readily appreciated that a young man with such unique opportunities for investigating the dangers that beset the individual, paid more than usual heed to safe-guarding his own belongings. To the limit of his purse he was covered in every direction. It was humanly impossible for anything to happen to him by which in some measure he would not benefit. His life was so planned that he could not lose.

And not only his life, but that of his wife as well. Mona was wired in with a completeness that left little to the imagination. Even quite trivial ailments to which she might be susceptible could not be contracted without profit; whereas more serious affections, as for example diphtheria, scarlet fever and appendicitis—apart from the pains and discomforts they might cause—were potential sources of wealth.

Neatly filed in a black japanned deed box at Harold's office was a bundle of policies mounting guard over the safety and well-being of his wife.

The only thing Harold had never thought of insuring her against was a loss of affection for himself—a strange oversight, considering that no one but himself was in a position to achieve that desirable object with permanent hope of success.

It may be thought that Mona had every reason to be happy. So she had—but she wasn't. Married life was very different from what her expectation had led her to believe. She always thought that having a husband would mean the possession of some one to whom one could talk; she did not realize that it actually meant having some one before whom she must sit in silence. Many women do not find out till too late that marriage is not so much an avenue for free speech as for enforced listening.

Harold Parsons was a capital example of a well established male type. When he came home in the evening he believed in telling his wife all he had said and done during the day. Also he believed in discouraging her from doing likewise. It was improbable she would have anything of interest to impart, whereas he never doubted that anything he chose to tell her was certain to be interesting. The sound of his own voice listened to by his own ears was sufficient warrant for that belief. He often reflected that Mona was very lucky to hear all these jolly things. Lots of men told their wives nothing. Very lucky she was—a lucky girl—pretty, too—and that was because she was happy and knew that she was well looked after and it couldn't matter a bit if she did have the influenza or a baby because in either case the expenses would be defrayed by the Nottingham Widows Special Endowment Insurance Society, Ltd., of Little Bretagne, St. Paul's Churchyard, E.C. 4.

It will now be seen that there was no room for any leakage in her appreciation. None that is, that Harold could foretell. It required the subtler ingenuity of his wife to find one.

AT THE beginning of their married life Mona had watched Harold expand with interest. She was glad he was getting on in the world; but with the passage of time an oppression grew upon her that there were perhaps one or two premiums due to her which he had overlooked. Perhaps premiums is not quite what she meant. Harold's failure, if any, lay in his reading of their deed of partnership. Harold was perfectly generous and a good all-round fellow but she could not dispel the idea that he would be a more amusing companion if at times he would let himself be amused rather than adopt the permanent rôle of amuser. The line of thought was intricate and the expression of it tongue-tying, but Mona knew what she meant. Hidden deep beneath the veils of husband-imposed silence, attention and responsiveness, she could not help believing there existed in her a power to be much more amusing than he was: in short, to be capital company, the sort of girl anybody ought to be glad about. She felt there were astonishing accidentals in her nature which a discriminating person ought to be happy to encounter. At first, of course, Mona did not know what was really the matter with her; she did not realize that she was suffering from a complaint which can only be diagnosed as a suppressed sense of humor.

Symptoms of the ailment would sometimes reveal themselves alarmingly and at embarrassing moments. A whirl of something to the brain, a sharp stab in the fifth rib and a really painful reflex action of the muscles which controlled the corners of her mouth.

It was agonizing—this inhibited mirth—agonizing and unexplainable, for it nearly always arose at the most telling points of Harold's stories, those critical moments when a client's defense had been broken by argument and a policy was thrust into his hand.

THERE was nothing funny in that. It was very important that clients should succumb. Should they fail to do so there would be no breakfast bacon. Harold's whole life was a statement of the seriousness of insurance. It would be insane, nay more, criminal, to laugh at so grave a matter. No one who is not mentally unsound would dream of laughing at his or her bread and butter.

And with that sober reflection came the stabbing pain again and the question, why not? There was a splendid insolence in the idea. To point at a cottage loaf and a vat of butter and hold one's sides and rock with laughter over them—why, that would be a marvelous thing to do—a noble complex to cultivate! With sudden intuition Mona saw that not to laugh at one's bread and butter was the act of a hog and a vulgarian. The serious things of life were not served up on a bread-trencher or shrewdly won in city office and at street corner: those were the funny things, the comic necessities of existence. The serious things were the making of life itself: the free elements, the intercourse of thoughts—partnership of spirits, the vasty spaces of sky and sea, the great unplumbed urns of mirth, and the call and answer of one soul to another in simple ordinary ways.

Now when the realization of all this took possession of Mona she was shaken by an emotion even greater than the emotion laughter withheld.

She saw with appalling clarity that in spite of the infinite precautions which fenced her matrimonial paths, she and Harold did not share a single thought or impulse in common. They had been married three years—long enough for her to stand aside and take stock squarely. The novelty of marriage had worn off, the adventure was over; there remained only the burning question: was there that in him and that in her to make a continuance of their life together an agreeable or even a tolerable arrangement?

Neither he nor she was a creature of passion. Both were ordinary mortals, blowing neither hot nor cold. But like ordinary mortals they stood in need of diversion, entertainment or whatever you like to call it. Harold, thanks to work and the esteem in which he held himself, was contented with his lot. Life to him was a simple transaction and quite jolly if one possessed the wit to see one's own jokes. For Harold had a finely developed sense of jokes and if he did not always make them himself he imported them from the Stock Exchange, which was just as bad. In his more beamish moods he would shoot off a few at Mona, who almost sank beneath them. For Mona's sense of humor was of another and a far more poignant kind. Anything absurd shone out like a star; but, as every one knows, stars are not made for one person to look at but for two—and those two must be close together in a happy mingling of intimacy and understanding. And that intimacy did not exist.

It was revealed, therefore, that she and her husband were poles apart and with that knowledge there shivered through Mona a sensation of positive repulsion. If there were no marriage of mind there could be no marriage of bodies. It was indecent, unthinkable to share a room with a man with whom one could not in honesty share a laugh. It was worse than slavery. Mona did not resent Harold's calling: it was as good as any other. It was his narrow belief in the importance of it that rasped every nerve in her system. It was her utter inability to escape from the insurance agent into the arms of the man, that shattered every ideal.

If only every now and then she could see his tongue in his cheek instead of his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat there would be excuse to hope. But that never happened, and because it never happened she knew that she was wedded to a puffed-up self-sufficient young man who, in the march of the onward years, would develop into a bundle of bounce and brag of an order too terrible to contemplate.

IT WAS Mona's birthday when the storm broke. Unlike many men Harold had not forgotten his duty. He brought home with him a present that few would have had the ingenuity to think of. The present was a policy to protect her against the growing peril of botulism, a disease which at that time was making rapid strides toward popularity. But this was not all. The brokers were genereous men who believed in the old principle of the baker's dozen. They had thrown in as a makeweight a safeguard against sleeping sickness and cerebrospinal meningitis.

"There you are, darling," said Harold, kissing the long envelope and placing it in her hand. "There isn't one in a thousand chances that you'll be victim to any of 'em, but if you are—well, there you are!" He put his arms round her neck and pecked at her ear.

Mona opened the thick folded paper and read:

"Botulism, sleeping sickness and cerebrospinal meningitis."

"That's the three."

He looked at her gaily and she at him and then she broke out in a great gust of laughter. He stood away and stared at her in frowning perplexity.

"Oh, my blessed darling!" she cried, "I've been worrying about you so, and it was there all the time."

"There, what was there?"

"Fun—seeing how ridiculous it all was. It's a lovely joke, Harold, a perfect joke."

"I don't see any joke," he repeated soberly.

"You—don't—see—" She stopped and the laughter died out of her eyes. She said very distinctly, "How perfectly awful!"

Harold crossed the room and sat with dignity in a very small chair.

"If you don't like my present," he said, "better let me have it back. There won't be much surrender value but I may as well collar what there is. Dash it, Mona, I can't think what's come to you."

Something in his words stirred her imagination.

"Surrender value! I wonder if you've the remotest idea what that means."

"Look here, Mona, you can't be well."

"Oh, yes, I am! The me you know is as well as can be, but I was thinking."

"About what?"

"The mistakes people can make in their life's policy."

"DEAR old thing," he protested, "that's rather an intricate subject for you to handle."

"Oh, very!" she agreed. "Terribly! How many women, I wonder, realize when they take out a whole life how small their surrender value is likely to be?"

"It's not like you, Mona, to talk this way."

"It's not like me to talk at all. That's why, now I've started, I find it easy to go on."

Rather brusquely he returned:

"I shouldn't. You'll only say a lot of things you don't mean."

She shook her head. "No, the danger is saying the things I do mean."

"I believe you wanted gloves," he said. "I believe you said you wanted gloves. If so, I'm sorry. I thought you'd appreciate something more lasting."

Her reply was inconsequent. "Gloves may come and gloves may go but botulism goes on forever."

"That's silly, and rather offensive," he said.

"Perhaps, but it's rather funny, too."

"You seem to find a lot of humor in things tonight," he replied. "Personally, I can't laugh at the same jokes."

"That's because you can't laugh at yourself."

He rose angrily. "Damn it! There's nothing funny in me."

"There is—there must be—"

"It's taken you a long time to find it out."

She nodded. "Three years."

"Look here, old girl," he said, with a heavy hand upon her shoulder. "If anything has put you out, say what it is."

"Shall I?"

"Go ahead. I've had a pretty trying afternoon roping in an actress for a special endowment with the Nottingham Widows.

Matter of truth, I've seen nearly as much temperament as I can do with. However, if you've a complaint, I'll listen."

He arranged himself, elbow on mantelpiece, ready to dispose of any argument. He was quite a good-looking fellow—a decent, presentable fellow, but oh, so smug, so sure of himself, so confident of being able to deal with the situation!

"My complaint is against you," said Mona, very slowly, for there is plenty of time in disputes between married couples.

"Go on," said Harold. "I'll deal with your charges alphabetically when you've finished framing them,"

"A," said Mona. "A complaint against myself is obviously without foundation. B. I have no intention of justifying my actions to any one. C. You are clearly out of sorts and need a tonic."

It was an admirable piece of mimicry, to which cause is to be attributed the deep frown which gathered on his handsome brow. At the sight of the frown once again that agonizing suppressed mirth drove a javelin through Mona's side.

"Oh, relax!" she implored. "For Heaven's sake, relax! Just think what life is for me with a face like that to look at. Can't you laugh? It would be easy enough if only you'd laugh. Here, look at this!" She held up the policy he had brought home. "Laugh at this, Hal. Think it over—you can't fail to—think of your state of mind when you got this for me—this and the rest of them with and without profits. Harold darling, ask yourself; it must, *must* be funny."

"I am waiting to hear your complaint," he said.

SHE became instantly serious. The man was a pachyderm: there was no reaching his funny-bone through that thick hide.

"I have none," she said; "it isn't worth while. We think in different terms, I'm afraid."

"If this is thought, preserve me from it," said he.

"That is exactly what I mean to do. Harold, I've deceived you for the three years of our marriage—deceived you disgracefully. I know it wasn't fair, but you rather overwhelmed me. Besides, I liked you and it's taken me a long time to struggle through."

"Through what?"

"A conventional idea and back to myself. Harold, I'm not a good wife!"

"Not—a good—"

"Oh, I don't mean I'm not a good wife—I mean simply what I say. I'm a bad investment. As a sinking-fund I'm through. It only remains to find out what my surrender value is worth."

He caught her shoulder. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know. Probably to make myself thoroughly ill and draw six pounds a week compensation."

"Mona!" he cried. "Mona, this is absurd."

She looked at him with a quick gleam of hope.

"I mean," he said, "it's atrocious, abominable."

She twisted from his grasp. "It's no good trying to stop me," she said, "because I mean to go—although," she added, "I'm glad you don't want me to."

"You'd better go upstairs and lie down. I imagine you'll come to your senses before long."

"I have," she retorted. "That's why this has happened."

He stood frowning—saying nothing.

Mona moved to the door and lingered a moment, swinging it to and fro between her hands.

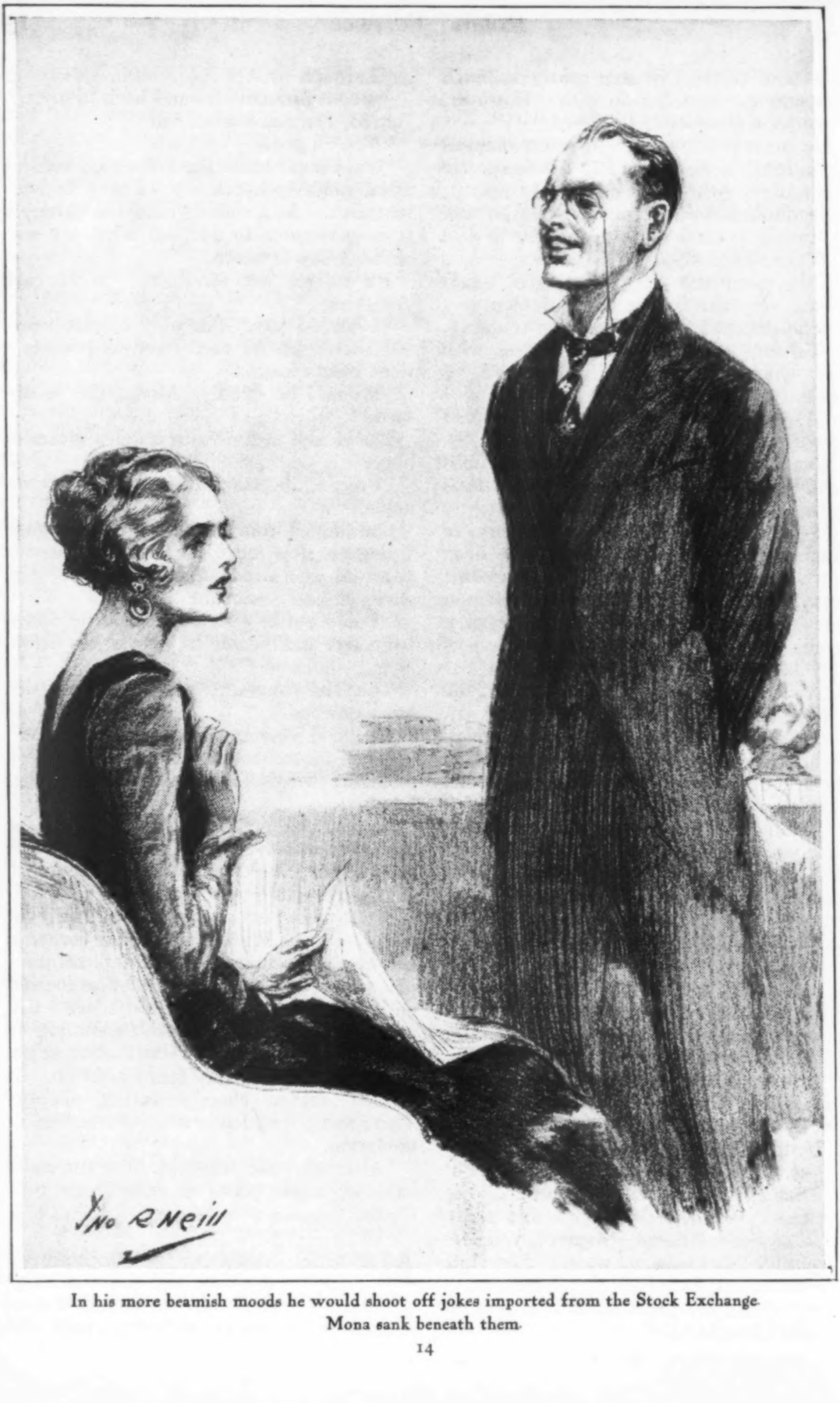
"Doesn't it strike you as funny," she asked tentatively, "that I should go off like this? Don't you think it's a funny reason?"

"Go upstairs," he repeated.

Mona passed out of the house as quietly as a mouse. She hailed a taxi at the corner of the street and snuggled into a dark corner—just such a corner where the companionship of laughter would have been ideal. But queerly enough she had no inclination to laugh. In that dim gloom the motive of her flight did not seem very funny after all. It seemed rather shoddy—rather shabby. There was no particular sense of freedom, or of elation.

"After all," she reflected, "the surrender value of a life policy is only about two-thirds."

HAROLD PARSONS went to his work next day in a dark and ominous frame of mind. It was a pity, for he had a most reluctant customer to deal with, a man who



In his more beamish moods he would shoot off jokes imported from the Stock Exchange. Mona sank beneath them.

up to the present had successfully resisted his most rhetorical importunities.

He stumbled into the man's office without a vestige of his accustomed bounce, accepted a chair, began to speak, lost the thread of his second sentence and stared dismally out of the window.

"Well," said the man, "is that all?"

Harold turned irritably. "You know as much about the thing as I do. If you want it, take it, if not, I'll go."

"Hullo, hullo!" was the surprised rejoinder. "This is something new. The usual trouble with you insurance fellows is you never give any one time to breathe. You create opposition by argument."

"Oh, go to the devil!" said Harold, and made for the door.

"Easy, easy! Invective is no way of doing business. Your firm won't thank you for losing my custom by calling me names."

"Your custom isn't so important to me as all that," Harold retorted. "There are things in life a lot more important than your custom."

The man, who was big and bearded and shrewd, looked at Harold approvingly.

"That's true enough," he admitted, "but you've never before given me a notion that you thought so. It was the appalling gravity of your appeals that put my back up and and set my teeth on edge. Of course money talks, but too much talk about money is apt to make us forget other and more vital matters. However, as you're a fellow with an idea of proportion and a sense of humor you can leave those papers on my desk and I'll look 'em over."

"What do you mean by proportion—sense of humor?" Harold demanded.

The big bearded man scratched himself and stretched his legs.

"Proportion, as I see it, is judging how high this is against that. A sense of humor as I see it is knowing pretty accurately how big an ass one's making of oneself."

"H'm! How's one to know if one has them or not?"

"The judgment seat is a man's breakfast table."

"How do you mean?"

"Assuming he's married—"

Harold pulled up a chair and sat down. He was interested. The other proceeded.

"It's the women, of course, who have the divine sense of humor—which is natural since they have such astoundin' opportunities to cultivate it."

"Eh?"

"Their husbands! An immense field! Just think how stupendously funny the average husband must be to the average wife."

"That's why marriage is such a success, I suppose," said Harold bitterly.

"No, it's why so often it's such a rotten failure. Women are queer cattle and they don't feed on staple diet, but they must have something to amuse 'em. You're a youngster and I'm assuming you're unmarried."

"Go on," said Harold.

"If ever you do marry take my advice: buy a cheval glass for your wife and from time to time look into it over her shoulder. It's the best way of seeing your two faces side by side and judging if one is a complement to the other and how much you've got in common. But when you make the experiment take care it's her face and not yours you look at. Leave the looking at you to her."

"Sounds like a lot of rubbish to me," said Harold.

"It may, but it isn't. Most marriages are failures because men spend too much time looking at themselves; and it's an odd thing that once you contract that habit it's devilish hard to rid yourself of it. The more you look the better pleased you'll be. The mirror marks a fundamental distinction between the sexes, for whereas a man looks into it for his own personal satisfaction, a woman looks into it for the satisfaction she's likely to give others."

HAROLD rose and moved to the door. Arriving there, he turned.

"Why have you shot all that stuff at me?" he asked.

The big man chuckled. "Damn it, Parsons, you earned it for the way you've bored me other times we've met."

"But I'm not a bore," said Harold, and added, "am I?"

"I only know you in a business sense."

"Well, I flatter myself I'm the same to everybody in business and out of it."

The big man ran fingers through his hair.

"Oh, my stars!" said he.

"Which means I *am* a bore."

"No-no, it merely means that I shouldn't be in too much of a hurry to get married or, on the other hand, perhaps I should."

"D'you know," said Harold, "that strikes me as rather funny: I can't think why."

Harold went out with a sure conviction that he had made a grave mistake in attempting to do business that day. As the result of a sleepless night and an uneaten breakfast his mind was too distraught for sober and sensible dealing. He should never have taken the risk, for behold, instead of appearing before a potential customer as a person of geniality, jocosity and sound, well-balanced argument, he had proved himself an ordinary frail mortal with an uncontrolled temper and a sense of personal grievance. But notwithstanding this he had enjoyed the tall bearded man's talk and the rough digs that had been made at him. In some ways there seemed to be an affinity between what Mona and this man had said.

Both, he was sure, regarded him as a good fellow; but at the same time they accused him of being a joke. Well, there was no harm in that, for he was a joke, at least, he was a purveyor and hander-on of jokes. That perhaps, wasn't quite the same. They were laughing at him rather than at his drolleries. But why? His head began to spin. Surely there was nothing ludicrous in a man absorbing himself in his work. Surely that was most creditable.

At the corner of Fenchurch Street he was stopped by an acquaintance who was employed on the Baltic Exchange. Began a distressing discourse on the technicality of Corn Prices. There was no stopping the fellow; the articles of his trade poured from him like grain through a leaky sack.

Harold had troubles enough of his own that morning not willingly to suffer more. He had troubles enough not to care if he were rude or not."

"I suppose," he said, "you only eat bread, old chap."

The Baltic enthusiast looked at him in surprise. Harold went on.

"Do you never give it a rest?"

"Give what a rest?"

"Corn. When you get back at night, does your wife have to go through all this?"

"I thought," came the slow and awful reply, "I thought you knew that my wife and I no longer live together."

"I'm most terribly sorry," said Harold, and gave the Baltic elbow a squeeze. "I'd clean forgotten. It was some other chap, wasn't it?"

"No," came the hot rejoinder. "Nothing of the kind. We agreed to separate; that is —well, you know what women are—I found she'd gone, that's all."

"Without a reason?"

"I never gave her a reason."

"I didn't mean to introduce the subject," said Harold, "but it seems odd a woman should behave like that."

"Odd? I should think so. It was a lesson to me, though."

"In what way?"

"Never to try to amuse a woman again."

"You used to amuse her?"

"I treated her just as I'd treat a man. I told her every damn thing I'd done. Oughtn't that to be enough?"

Harold nodded sympathetically. In a bright flash he reconstructed a dinner-table dialogue between this parted twain:

"White Karachi dropped five-sixteenths at noon: might be worth buying for a rise."

And his wife:

"Yes—did it?"

How different from his own racy recitals to Mona—how different! How—exactly alike!

Suddenly Harold asked: "Was she laughing when she left you?"

"Who told you that?" came the retort.

Harold bolted.

ARRIVING at his office he opened the black deed box and took from within the policies drawn up in favor of his wife. It was a formidable bundle. He spent an hour going through them. Not one covered him against the emergency in which he found himself. This being so, it was clearly evident they were useless and would be better burnt. But Harold's business instinct rebelled against the idea of burning papers which represented a considerable sum of invested capital. Accordingly he jotted down the individual value of each and posted them for immediate surrender, to the various companies with whom they were contracted.

"And now," said he, "what am I going to do with this money?"

For a long while he pondered, rapping his lower teeth with the vulcanite cap of a fountain pen. Presently he got up, took his hat from the peg and went out to visit a firm of brokers who would insure anything from a battleship to a golf ball.

"But it's unheard of," said the representative. "Rank folly, my dear Parsons. No firm is going to accept a risk like that unless you pay a fantastic premium."

"Are you prepared to do it?"

"We'll do anything on terms—but modern life being what it is, you're humanly certain to lose."

"I'll take a chance."

Some calculations were made and the result handed to Harold for inspection.

"It's the best we can offer. Let's see. You've been married three years already and it's unreasonable to suppose you'll pass another three or four without putting in a claim. I'm not at all sure the transaction isn't highly immoral. It's a definite incentive to divorce."

"I'm looking at it in the other way," said Harold. "Your terms are outrageous, of course, but I don't complain, and since you're on something for nothing I don't see why you should complain, either. Have the policy sent along to my office."

"You're determined then?"

"Quite. I'm entitled to protect myself if I want to."

"But you're protecting your wife."

"You miss the point," said Harold.

Then he went out and bought a cheval glass.

WHEN she left home, Mona Parsons drove to the Queen's Palace Hotel and booked a room. She was not the sort of girl to regard her mother as a sanctuary for the conjugally parted. She was by no means certain that her mother would welcome her return for such an eccentric cause. The old lady, having married off her children and interred her husband, was making agreeable use of her second childhood by living at a Bridge Club. Any interference in this spirited routine would naturally cause her indignation and distress. Mona decided, therefore, that she would be better on her own.

Of course the privacy of her apartment afforded a capital opportunity for unrestrained mirth at husbands and their ways, but just then she could think of nothing funny and the impulse she had so long subdued showed no disposition to vent itself in explosions of gaiety. She reflected that this was just as well, because loud and prolonged laughter coming from a room known to be occupied by a single individual is apt to engender the belief among guests and chambermaids that a lunatic is abroad.

Laughter being thus ruled out, Mona stretched herself on the bed and sniveled a bit instead and felt miserable and badly used. She wondered why she worried such a lot that Harold was not all she had wanted him to be. Logic supplied the answer that it was because she was fond of him. Well, of course she was fond of him but that did not excuse him for being such a dunderhead. It made his sins all the blacker. There grew in her mind a realization that comes to all of us, sooner or later, that it is only those to whom we are deeply attached that we can so poignantly detest. Harold was all right, but he was so pompous and inflated—he was such an awful bore. Because he was a man he had never allowed her the privilege of boring him back, of reprisal borings. That is what she should have done or she should have flung a dinner plate at his head, instead of laughing at him up her sleeve and bolting like a thief in the night, and kidding herself that her flight was just a jolly caddish shirking of responsibility. Not the responsibility to see that his meals were served punctually and to his taste, but to bump his head against the wall until such a time as some sense was knocked into it. And thinking of that, why hadn't he given her a good shaking when she told him she was going away, instead of standing there like a great oaf and repeating "Go upstairs—go upstairs," as if she would behave better on another landing?

A twist—and that idea gave Mona a sudden dig in the ribs and out shot a laugh like a crash of broken glass.

Oh, dear, how funny husbands were! But now technically she had no husband. So the laugh died.

"What am I going to do-o-oo?" wailed Mona addressing an ormolu light fixture. "The longer I stop here the bigger idiot I shall feel."

It is possible she would have returned home then and there had not the only pair of walking shoes she had brought with her been carried off to those distant regions where numbers are chalked on their soles in solemn testimony that they are supposed to have been cleaned.

So there was nothing for it but to go to bed and this she did and felt far more ashamed of being there alone than she had felt the night before of sharing a room with a man who failed to realize how funny he was.

IT WAS nerves that kept Mona meandering about the West End for the better part of the next day—nerves and a growing sense of loneliness and guilt.

The night passed away from home seemed to surround her with shame and put her beyond the reach of rapproachement. She found herself wondering how Harold had got on for his breakfast. The two servants they kept were competent enough but they needed an "eye."

And what about orders? Who could say that a dinner would be prepared? It is one thing to leave a man but one must not starve him into the bargain. Then again, would the house be properly kept. Under her management it was always spick-and-span; denied her management it might be spick but it would certainly not be span.

Mona giggled at that because it was just the sort of joke that Harold could never see.

Came then an irresistible desire to be present when Harold didn't see something. She remembered with delight the failure she had had with him over the dachshund story: the dog whose legs were so short that they barely reached the ground. . . .

Next minute Mona was in a taxi speeding homeward.

She arrived on the doorsteps at the precise moment that Harold dragged wearily round the corner from the tube station. Everything about him was dejected: even his hat was straight instead of at the jaunty angle he always affected. At the sight of Mona he stopped short, then came forward again quicker.

It was going to be frightfully difficult, so she said:

"I haven't the latch key. I didn't know I'd want it."

Harold was looking at her and he tried to open the front door with the key of the deed box.

"Bouff!" exploded Mona, without the slightest effort to restrain herself.

Harold looked at her, then at the key, grinned a bit, rectified his mistake and opened the door for her.

"May I?" she queried, hesitating. "I mean, d'you want me to?"

"Oh, go in!" said he. "Get inside. Don't be such a silly ass, Mona."

THE informal speech had a warmth and geniality she had scarcely expected.

In the hall Mona pulled off her hat and gloves, threw them on a chair, and turned into the dining-room.

Thither he followed her and closed the door.

"I *am* sorry," she said. "Really, Harold—deep down sorry. Something snapped in me—and—well, go on, tick me off." Womanlike she added, "Of course it was your fault, too."

"I know that," he retorted. She shook her head. "Oh, yes, I do! Among other things it was that present of mine."

She turned away to hide disappointment. Something in his attitude on the doorstep had led her to hope for better things.

"Why did you come back, Mona?"

She lifted her shoulders. "I found out the surrender value of a wife is how much her loss means to her husband."

Harold nodded. "Most emergencies are covered in insurance terms," he agreed. "By the way, I surrendered this afternoon all the polices made out in your favor, Mona."

She looked up with a flash. "You didn't lose much time. Then I suppose you thought I shouldn't come back."

"No. I wanted to provide against an eventuality in case you did. Here, put this away somewhere."

He handed her a long envelope.

"What's this?"

"Read it if you like."

Mona opened the envelope and inside was a policy assuring her of an adequate income in the event of her husband boring her so much that she was no longer able to live beneath the same roof with him.

She read it over twice before fully comprehending its meaning. At the second reading her free hand went to her face and her fingers pressed against her mouth, hard, hard. It was not laughter she sought to check.

"But dash it, dear," said Harold in genuine concern, "you can't feel that way about it—why, it must be funny—it must be!"

Then somehow her face came to be buried in his shoulder and his arms were around her—a protection, as it were, against "all risks."

Harrigan's Head

Salome Finds a Counterpart in This Woman
Explorer Who Works a Tremendous Revenge
on the Man Who Failed Her

By Stephen Vincent Benét

I THINK women ought to be kept out of what have been the male professions. They are likely to do them so uncomfortably well.

Take Mary Ferrit, for instance. Of course, you can call her an exception, with exceptional training: only daughter of the great naturalist, cut her teeth on a Latin classification, and all that. But she wasn't merely her father's inheritor or successor. She originated, and in many ways she surpassed him. Of course her genius took a rather different turn from his. But it was genius. I ought to know.

I didn't know Mary till she was thirty-four, and great, but I can't imagine her ever having been young. She was one of those people who, for looks, are born middle-aged. I saw a photograph of her once, taken when she was twelve. It gave you an uncanny feeling. She was just the same, then, as at thirty-four; and to see her in the appropriate garb of twelve made you feel she must have been taken in fancy dress. Life often seems to have no sense of proportion.

I don't quite know how I became so much her friend. Possibly because I know no more about exploration than a tame goldfish, and she said it rested her to talk with somebody who didn't ask her fool questions about safaris and pygmies and Rivers of Doubt. We generally used to discuss bookbindings, as I remember, and Japanese snuff-bottles. She had an astonishing number of side interests for a genius.

I don't think I have ever known a more interesting woman or one more devoid of anything the word "woman," plain and simple, usually summons to the imagination. That made something of the marvel of Mary, too. She looked like the dumpy, ugly secretary of some provincial welfare league. Her clothes had a dreadful sort of tidy fussiness about them; she had no more charm than a waffle-iron: you would have thought her the sort of person who prays and takes out accident policies before going a two-hours' journey in a Pullman. To think of her plowing her way through uncharted jungles and tearing forgotten secrets out of the desert was simply ridiculous. It was even absurd to think of her in the usual paraphernalia of the explorer. And yet, I suppose she was the greatest explorer and one of the greatest naturalists of our time.

Her father, as I say, had trained her. She discovered a new something-or-other at an age when most little girls are trundling hoops. She attended scientific congresses with her hair down her back. Her father died when she was twenty and she kept on: luckily the Ferrit Silk Mills still paid dividends and she was the one surviving Ferrit, for exploration of the sort she wanted is a costly game.

At twenty-five she had made her first two expeditions up the Puru and was already collecting gold medals from learned societies. Her subterranean reputation among the people who knew was established then, and it grew with the years; the kind of reputation the average newspaper reader never hears about unless death or some accident brings it into the press. The accident in her case was the Amazon business.

It wasn't really as difficult or as important a thing as she'd done before, but it was news, and it made her famous in the time it takes a cable to cross the Atlantic. "American Woman Explorer Finds Unknown Tribe of Amazons—Savage Women Rule Men with Iron Rod in"—you can see the story. Pictures of Mary looking frumpy beside the Amazon chieftainess, and Mary in a canoe, and Mary sitting on a dead jaguar, all over the rotogravure sections. And then there were the interviews and front-page stories. It just happened to be one of those things that catch the public eye and hold it; and Mary was received with all the publicity of a prominent film actress when she came back to New York. Then the book came out and the lectures began. Mary was the lion of the winter.

I liked her. Don't misunderstand that. I liked her from the first. I was unutterably curious—not about the things she had done, so much, though they were extraordinary things—but about herself. She was so incongruous.

I remember the first time I met her at a deadly smart, formal dinner with every other woman groomed to the teeth, and Mary wearing something that looked like a Victorian housekeeper's borrowed mourning. They got her talking about some pleasant breed of savages who not only collect their enemies' heads and preserve them, but in some way shrink them to the size of tennis balls. She went into the process in considerable detail, compared it with others, the Egyptian way of mummification and so forth. It was incredible to hear her commonplace voice go on in its flat calm way about that, while her commonplace fingers crumbled bread. If the housekeeper I spoke of had started discussing Hegel, it would have been less surprising.

I saw a great deal of Mary that winter and while my curiosity as to just what she could be like inside was only tantalized, never satisfied, we became good friends. That was all, one couldn't imagine anything more, with Mary. At least, I couldn't. That was why I was so shocked when the Harrigan affair came up.

HARRIGAN was a born client, in the Latin sense of the word: one of those charming, pleasant people who have cracks in them. You may suspect the cracks but you never know how wide they are and everything goes along very agreeably until Destiny turns a screw and brings about a moment of strain. Then the Harrigans lose their heads and there is generally hell to pay—for somebody else. One person like that is more dangerous than a dozen purposeful Iagos.

I'll admit that mine was not the general opinion of Harrigan. At least, everybody knew he was worthless, but then everybody liked him—so he was made allowances that better men are denied. He had no real occupation, though he dabbled in all the arts: money lent him was money thrown out of the window. Yet he always existed somehow, well-brushed, well-dressed, well-mannered, always ready to do you any small favor in hope of being repaid with a larger one. Unoccupied women with too few cares adored him, and yet it never made trouble with their husbands: he was too canny. Morality of any sort didn't exist for him; he was so light with his dishonors—a cork, bobbing serenely in the stream of life while finer things sank.

One rare quality he did have: he never wore out a welcome. He would disappear for months, even years at a time, from New York and the people who knew him, to prey somewhere else, no doubt, with the fastidious delicacy of a moth. He was never missed, even by people he called his best friends—but when he came back, everybody was pleased to see him. As for family or relations or human ties of any sort, you couldn't imagine his having them. Well, that was Harrigan.

He drifted into Mary's particular milieu as lightly and easily as he drifted everywhere. Mary was a person to be seen with, that year, and Harrigan was unfailing in the accuracy with which he was seen with the right people. I first saw them together at the opening of her exhibition, the one that made her second reputation.

The exhibition itself was an astonishing affair. The invitations had read like those to a private view—nothing more. They didn't say a private view of what. Then it leaked out that it was to be an exhibition of stuffed animals, and while everybody went, it was with the expectation of being unutterably bored.

When you think of stuffed animals you think of horrible things: moose-heads around the wall of a fraternity grill-room, moth-eaten bears in a dime-museum, worn out skins stretched across the floors of men's dens—that sort of thing. These were different. Stuffed? They were alive—alive in the one enduring sense, for they were great art.

There was an Arctic hare, for instance, in one case: a hare crossing the snow; and the snow was sugar or mica, I suppose, and the hare should have been dead. Just that, but as you looked, you stood under the pallid glow of that frozen silent sky, you felt the hare feel that dry, implacable cold; you saw the snow stretch for miles, to the very pole. How the devil did she know? She had never been in the Arctic. But she did know. Call it a trick, a bastard art, an illegitimate use of material—it was genius all the same.

Then there was a gaudy parrot on a bough, in the deep, green jungle; all the jungle in his colored coat. And there was a condor, gripped to a rock, staring out into thin, utter space from the very top of the world. And a snake that was Eden's snake. The quintessence of purity and mockery, of earth-defying arrogance and lust colder than brine—all in little glassed-in boxes, a few feet wide, a few feet deep. She had done the whole thing herself, stuffing, mounting, background—everything. And then she had breathed on the puppets, and they lived.

The funny thing, after you had recovered your breath, was to hear the new people come in chattering, and then suddenly to hear their voices drop as they began to see.

She had every one at her feet, the second day. The other room, where she received, was a sea of flattery—no, not flattery, for it was sincerely meant. Only people have only a few phrases for real enthusiasm and for the other kind; and when those are done, they begin to repeat.

She couldn't have helped being pleased. It was enough to please any one, but she didn't seem to care. She just sat there, immobile as an awkward wax doll, without a smile, and said carefully how glad she was that we liked her animals.

Then Harrigan came in. I noticed their meeting.

They must have met before, for he was just familiar enough. He started in at once, saying pleasant, congratulatory, perfectly unmeaning things in his nice light voice. And she looked at him, and I saw her face. The mask slipped; she had the look of some one who comes at last after incredible thirst, on a spring of water. I couldn't believe it. But there it was. He saw it, of course, and buttered. And she drank it in.

I don't want to see a woman's soul stand naked in her eyes again. It isn't right that any one should see a thing like that. It shakes the fitness of things.

The greatest sculptor we've ever had came up and said things some people would have given their eye-teeth for. Mary said she was so glad he liked her animals, and turned back to Harrigan. And Harrigan said something utterly obvious; and you could see that he was the only person there whose opinion counted—to her.

I could have wrung his neck. I wish I had.

It wasn't a week before people began to talk.

THEY were always together, after that. One could understand Harrigan, for after all, Mary was a rich woman. But Mary—Mary Ferrit who had made that condor, and written her stubby, absurd little name across desert and jungles—Mary Ferrit and that!

The trouble was that I did understand too well. Genius has a fatal flair for pretty, weakly ruthless mediocrity. Only it doesn't seem quite so bad, somehow, when a man of Mary's caliber gets entangled with a woman of Harrigan's as it does when the sexes are reversed.

At first I still had some hope that she knew what she was doing and, for some reason, chose. But you couldn't see them together and keep believing that; she was fatuous, really fatuous. There's no other word.

There was never an engagement announced. Every morning, when I picked up the paper, I looked for news of the marriage. But it never got into the papers. Something else that I might have foreseen, but didn't, happened. Harrigan went away.

He had always been able to disappear like a stone sinking into water, and he did so now. One day he was there, with Mary everywhere he went; the next day he was gone, and Mary shut herself up in her apartment and saw nobody for three days. The reporters didn't get hold of it: Mary had friends. But of course everybody knew. Her enemies spread the story he couldn't stick it out, when it came to the pinch, and added they didn't blame him. It certainly sounded plausibly Harriganesque.

I hoped, for her pride's sake, that she had found him out at the last moment and had sent him away, but I didn't believe what I hoped. The disappearance was too characteristically Harrigan's way out of a boring situation. Anyhow, I felt sorry for Mary.

When she started to go about again, the mask was back: she was completely impassive. She even spoke of Harrigan as of a casual acquaintance whose return might be expected tomorrow. The rest of us tried to forget Harrigan as much as possible—which wasn't hard. And he didn't come back to remind us. Sometimes I would think I saw him on the street, but it was always a chance resemblance, and gradually I began to believe that he wouldn't return to New York while Mary was there. That was like him, too.

Next fall she gave her second exhibition, just before she started on the new expedition that was to be the great one. I took both things as a sign that she was cured, especially as the second exhibition surpassed even the first.

The first had been entirely devoted to animals; the second dealt with the human. No, not store-window wax-models dressed in beads and cotton batting. These breathed.

The Amazon group was the masterpiece. It had a room to itself. There were only two figures: a savage woman whose every line and sinew was barbaric with life, stooping over a conquered enemy, a man, to administer the coup-de-grâce with a brutal little spear. But the expression on the face of the man, caught at the very instant when he stared up, horrid with fear, and felt death coming down on him! It shook your heart in your body. It was diabolic.

Still, I was glad, for it showed a recovered Mary. No convalescent mind could have created that. I went in to see her.

She was as badly dressed as usual, and even under the soft light she looked haggard and worn. But I put that down to the strain of the preparations for the new expedition.

I said something about "your marvelous Amazon."

A queer look came into her eyes.

"You like it, really?" she said.

I elaborated until I saw she wasn't listening any more. She saw I saw, and smiled.

"Sorry," she said. "But I'm glad you like my Amazon." Again her eyes were queer. She breathed, softly.

"I like my Amazon," she said. "Yes—I like my Amazon."

I hardly saw her again before she sailed. She was very busy: the success of the exhibition had been tremendous and people were making ridiculous offers. She sold some of the things and lent some to the Museum, but though she was offered a huge price for the Amazon group, she would neither sell nor lend it.

Well, the new expedition was a failure, dolefully complete—her first failure. And more than that: they began to say that Mary had lost her grip. And then they began to say other things. The interpreter, a half-bred swine if there ever was one, talked. You know how those things leak out. Pretty soon it was being said—and believed—that Mary had never made half her discoveries, really, and that those she had made were due to the blindest sort of luck. How we love to set people up on pedestals, these days, and then kick them down again before they have had time to get used to the elevation!

Her friends fought for Mary as they could, but you can't fight that peculiarly malarial sort of slander with mortal weapons. Mary came back discredited, came back with every fool in the country believing her an exploded sham.

If she had faced the stories with her old dowdy, magnificent immobility things might have been different. But she didn't; as a matter of fact, she couldn't. She was too sick and broken. The expedition had been ill-starred in every way. She had caught something in those obscure jungles, something deadly. She kept to herself and wouldn't see any of us.

FINALLY she sent for me. I was prepared for a change, almost any change. But I was shocked when I saw her. She saw that, and smiled.

"Yes, I'm dying," she said.

I did what one always does—the false, hearty voice—the "oh, we'll have you up and out again in a month." But she wasn't fooled.

"No—I'll never go out again," she said, with her old, precise calm. "I'm finished—I know what's got me. No, George, it isn't contagious! The doctors are very much interested, bless them! It's the first case they've ever seen. No, I'm in no actual pain. But it takes such a time! Even now, it takes such a time!"

I couldn't say anything. She sat musing for a while.

Then, "Well, anyhow, I've done something—" she said.

"Something! Enough for—"

"Oh, no! If I'd had five years more, perhaps, but not this way. Still, I've done something. That, for instance." And she smiled.

I followed her glance as it rested upon the case that held the Amazon and her prey. She had it against the wall. Yes, it was genius. But it made the haircloth chairs of the characteristically Victorian sitting-room look queer.

She brooded on it with her eyes.

"What are you going to do with it?" I said, and could have bitten my tongue off. But she only seemed amused.

"Perhaps you'll be able to tell me that, George, when you hear what I sent for you to hear. You must have wondered why I sent for you, George."

"I'm very glad you—"

"Oh, yes, yes, but you must have wondered. Well, you were decenter than the rest about Seward Harrigan and—me—George. More curious and yet—decenter."

"I hope I—"

"But, George, you *were* curious. I don't blame you. I owe you something instead. I'm curious, too; I know how hard it is to keep down. But you kept it down. So now I'll tell you the story. And afterward you can tell me what to do with—that." She jerked her thumb at the Amazon.

She seemed to think over various beginnings in her mind, then—"Did you ever read Wilde's 'Salome,' George?" she said, abruptly.

"Why, yes!"

"Well," she said, and spread out her hands, "it's that."

I stared at her.

"Yes, it is ridiculous, isn't it? Burlesque! Salome—the Dance of the Seven Veils—and me, a fat, ugly little woman in stupid clothes."

"Mary!"

"Oh, I know what I am. The body's only a case—yes—but you have to wear it. That's something you must never forget. If you once forget, you're gone. . . . I forgot," she said.

It was too painful. "Listen, Mary," I said.

"No, I want to tell you. But there's something else. . . . I could see, all that winter, that you wanted to tell me about Seward Harrigan. You needn't have. . . . Even then I knew what he was. I knew precisely what he was."

"But then, why—"

"Oh, yes, why? Do you imagine that ever matters? If it ever had, this world would be so beautifully eugenic by now. I tell you, I knew what he was precisely; I knew it as I know the bones in a parrot—with one cold part of my mind. . . . But I didn't care. I didn't have room to care. . . . Of course I was a fool, a fatuous fool. And knew it; but it didn't stop me. . . . I couldn't have believed he cared, and yet, I did believe. I told you I'd forgotten this bodily garment of ours.

"I did things I never would have dreamed I could do. Incredible, fatuous things. . . . How I must have bored him! But you knew him. He was willing to be bored for—certain advantages.

"I just had sense enough not to put an engagement in the papers. But we were going to be married, in June." She laughed rather dreadfully. "A June bride—Mary Ferrit—in a church—with flowers. I suppose I'd have worn white satin and carried orange blossoms. That was how bad I was. . . .

"And yet, all the time, the cold, other part of my mind kept telling me the truth. And I knew it—and it didn't make any difference. Not till the last time."

She passed her hand across her face.

"WE'D been sitting here, talking about the wedding. I was going to make him a settlement—afterward. Oh, I knew, believe me, I knew. . . . The phonograph had been going. I'd always hated the things but—he liked canned music, so I bought one.

"I don't remember how it came up, but he suggested that we go somewhere and dance. I don't dance badly, you know. It's my one feminine accomplishment.

"Then something got into me. Oh, I was fatuous indeed! . . . No, it wasn't quite that: it was just that I'd forgotten for the moment what I told you we mustn't forget—forgotten it completely. I couldn't have forgotten it more completely if I'd died.

" 'No,' I said, 'we won't go anywhere and dance. We'll stay here and I'll dance.' I really said that.

"Of course he said that would be wonderful. . . . The fool I was—the fool! . . . Can you imagine the scene?"

I could—and I shut my eyes.

"Well, I danced for him—Salome—to something canned, on the phonograph. In a tailored suit. I even picked up a scarf from somewhere—a magenta scarf. The Dance of the Seven Veils. Salome before Herod! Mary Ferrit! Me!"

She stopped as if she didn't intend to go on. I had no wish to prompt her.

"It must have been immortally grotesque, but even so—

"I could have stood it if he'd gone out of the room and had never come back. That might have been brutal but it would have been honest. I could have stood it if he'd laughed—really laughed—as a man laughs. But he didn't do either of those things."

"He wouldn't," I said savagely.

"No, he wouldn't. He didn't. He lost his head. He laughed and tried to cover it up. And, afterward, he could look me in the face and say that I had been wonderful. He dared say that. . . . It didn't come upon me completely till after he'd gone. Then I knew."

She paused afresh and when she began again it was from another angle, thank God.

"You must have wondered how I ever managed to do the things I did—my work, I mean."

I breathed easier. "Yes," I said, "I suppose we've all wondered."

"Well, I'll tell you. There's just one reason—a certain virginity in me, not only of body, but of mind."

It seemed an odd explanation, but I have known a supreme court justice who firmly believed that his freedom from rheumatism was due to carrying horse-chestnuts in his pockets. So I kept still: she went on.

"Virginity of mind, that was the important thing. You see, I never had been a woman—when I did those things. I didn't do them as a woman; I did them as a mind. Even when I was young I wasn't feminine in any sense. I never had a chance to be if I'd wanted. All my bringing up was against it—all my life with my father. And when he died I knew what I wanted to do, and they weren't feminine things. Besides, even if I—well, you've seen that old photograph of me?"

I nodded, hardly conscious of what I was doing.

"Well, I never looked very different. Not that I cared, then; I had my work to do. And because I wasn't a woman—because I never had any feminine attributes—I could do things no woman could ever have done. A woman would have gone under on that second trip up the Puru, let alone the Amazons. But I didn't go under. I went ahead. Every one has some sort of mascot, talisman. That was mine. And it was a perfect talisman—till Seward Harrigan came.

"I never thought it could fail me. I thought I'd never be different. I really thought I could get away from the real curse of Eve. I was rather arrogant, then. And I was wrong."

She breathed deeply.

"I was wrong. Seward taught me that, at least, exquisitely. The being a woman, you know—that women can't escape. I, being born a woman, and distressed with all the needs and notions of my kind—"

I hadn't known that she read modern poetry. But there seemed to be more and more things about her that I hadn't known until now.

"THAT woman knows," she said. "But how was I to know? I'd never been distressed with all the needs and notions of my kind before. Then Harrigan—and I was. Oh, exquisitely!"

She gazed at her Amazon.

"And yet, the body isn't so important. He could have had that, if that had been what he'd taken. But it wasn't; it was my talisman, my virginity of mind. . . . I know that after he'd gone that night, with a sort of biting finality.

"It wasn't even as if it were something he'd wanted. He hadn't wanted it; but he'd taken it, destroyed it forever. *And* laughed. . . . You don't get that particular thing again, once you've lost it. No! . . . He'd done me the wrong I thought Fate itself couldn't do me; he'd made me commit the unpardonable sin against my self. . . . Well, there was only one way out. I took it. You know the rest."

So she had sent him away after all! Well, that was something.

"But it wasn't any use, you know, it wasn't any use," she went on. "*That* was what I hadn't foreseen, though I suppose I had some sort of inkling, even before I went on this last expedition. My talisman was gone. . . . It wasn't any use. . . . You've all of you been most kind, not believing that ape of an interpreter. But curiously enough, he's been telling the truth, the unbelievable truth, for the first time in his life. I bungled things, horribly, shamefully, first and last."

Her voice sank to a whisper.

"He was with me all the time, night and day."

There was no need to ask her whom she meant.

"Night and day! 'Though I take the wings of the morning' . . . Well, I took the wings of the morning. I went to the uttermost parts of the sea. But wherever I went he was there, laughing a little and trying to cover it up; and around his neck, like a badge, my lost talisman.

"Oh, I thought I had paid him out when I gave my second exhibition. But I hadn't. Even after that he kept paying me out, instead. He's still paying. Curious that such a weak man could make such a strong ghost! That's why I'm glad I'm dying: because I'm going to the one place where he can't follow me any more. If he follows me there"—her voice rose sharply—"there isn't any justice. But I don't think he can."

There was a long silence in the room, a a silence that left many things unexplained. My heart felt as if it were being twisted, somehow. I thought of Harrigan.

"Oh, damn him!" I said impotently. "Damn him! If he ever comes back—"

She looked at me queerly.

"He'll never come back, George."

"He may. And if he does—"

"He'll never come back. He can't, very well. You see, he's never been away!"

"*What?*"

"He's there, George. Her eyes went over to the group in the glass case.

For a moment I thought she had lost her mind. Then, looking at the face of the male figure, under the descending spear, I thought I saw what she meant. It wasn't Harrigan at all of course; it was a savage; and yet, once you thought of Harrigan in connection with it, you couldn't think of anything else. It was not Harrigan; no, but it was his soul, stripped naked, shivering. And not one of us had noticed it! So that had been Mary's way of paying him out! It was like her: it had the superb audacity and cruelty of genius.

"Well, I'll be—" I said helplessly, but her next words struck me perfectly cold.

"He's always been there. I killed him, you see."

"Mary!"

"No, George, I'm not mad. I killed him."

"You may have killed his soul, perhaps, in that infernal statue. But—"

"No, that's just the part I didn't kill. I only killed *him*. But I did do that. I thought you understood that, George. What other way out could there have been?"

I stared at her—stared at her.

"Oh, yes, I killed him. I curled and combed his comely head—he looked so grand when he was dead!" Her voice had a singing note. "So grand when he was dead, George—and the wind was blowing—blowing in turret and tree! . . .

"No, I don't need the doctor. I'm sane, George—never saner. Only, I keep remembering.

"HASN'T it ever occurred to you that a woman who has been in the jungle so much might hold life rather cheap? And hasn't it ever occurred to you that a woman of my profession might have singular advantages in committing a murder?"

I didn't think she was mad, now. But I wanted to get away. And yet, something held me to my chair.

"Oh, singular advantages, George! A doctor hasn't better. I wonder why more doctors aren't murderers. I suppose they don't take the trouble. . . .

"It was so very easy. You, for instance, would have been much harder. You have family, real friends, a place where you'd be missed from; you aren't in the habit of disappearing. Harrigan was different.

"I told him I'd found an apartment for him to live in till we were married. I didn't want my Harrigan living where he was. Oh, yes, he believed. Why shouldn't he? I made a surprise out of it: a silly woman's present to her sweetheart. He seemed quite pleased. He paid his bill and brought his things. I was going to take him up to the apartment that evening.

"I knew he wouldn't tell anybody about it. He was tactful in things like that.

"He didn't bring much; it was a principle of his to go through life without excess baggage.

"We were alone here.

"He didn't suspect at all until the very instant. Then he put up his hands, but he wasn't quick enough. I was dancing for him again, a knife dance, this time. Morgiana. I knew just where to strike.

"No, he didn't really cry out. . . .

"He'd tried to cover up a laugh again. I mightn't have done it, after all, if it hadn't been for that.

"You know what his face looked like, in the last instant. It's—there!"

"Oh, my God!" I said, and put my hands over my eyes, but the quiet voice went on.

"Yes, it was easy enough. . . . Stains? There are chemicals."

"But the—the—the—"

"There's a little furnace in my workshop, George—a chemist's furnace. Clothes, all that sort of thing. . . . There wasn't a trace when I'd done—except for him. But I had a plan—for him— You wouldn't understand the details."

I was glad for that.

"But the body—it isn't so hard to alter it, when you know. It takes time, yes, but I had all night. There was only one thing I kept—a souvenir? A trophy? At any rate, I felt he owed it to me, for the time he'd lost it." Her stubby finger pointed directly at my head. The strain suddenly grew too great and I burst into laughter—unpleasant laughter, for the pendulum in my mind had swung back, and I was quite sure again that she was insane. She looked at me quietly until I'd stopped.

"A grotesque idea? The Amazons do it, George, with the people they hate. And the Borneans and— Perhaps when one sees too much of people like that one gets to thinking in their ways. But then Marguerite de Valois did something of the same sort, I believe, and she was white. Only in her case the reason was love. That wasn't my reason.

"I used the Amazon process. Even so, there had to be a hiding-place, naturally—"

"Naturally," I said, idiotically. She saw what that meant at once; she was terribly quick.

"An insane woman doesn't talk the way I'm talking, George. An insane woman couldn't have imagined a hiding-place like mine—secret as death itself and yet so public that you and every one you know have passed it a dozen times without suspecting. An insane woman couldn't have made the trophy of Harrigan that I've made—there—in that case—the light despoiler of women struck down by a woman at last and afraid, afraid! Oh, you still don't believe—I can see it—you still think I never killed him; you still think I'm mad! Well, George—"

SHE rose and walked slowly over to the case that held the group. I watched her dully, wondering what new freak of mania had taken her now.

The case had doors at the back; she opened them and stepped in. For an instant I saw her stand there, incongruous in that artificial jungle, dwarfed by the heroic figures of her creation, looking down like a dowdy Nemesis at the terrified face of the man under the spear.

Then something flashed in her hand, and fell. The head of the male figure split apart as neatly as a coconut. I think I cried out. The figure was so atrociously lifelike.

I found myself over by the bell, a moment later, pressing it frantically. But I wasn't quick enough: she was coming toward me.

She was holding something wrapped in a cloth—something that had been hidden inside the thin, composition shell of the head of the broken figure like the kernel in an almond. She was talking, saying something about Harrigan and death and a trophy.

"And now will you believe me, George?" she said suddenly, and stretched out her hands with their burden toward me in a gesture—Salome's gesture.

The cloth fell away from the round thing in her hands. It was Harrigan's head!

Plotting Out the Future of the World

The Great Samara

Catherine Visits London as a Statesman's Envoy, and Finds Herself the Cause of Jealousy Between Two Royal Conspirators

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

Illustrations by Joseph A. Maturo

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

AN ENGLISHMAN seated upon a divan in one of the lofty rooms of the Salons Privés nudged on the arm his companion, newly arrived from England. He was by way of being showman and had been pointing out the notabilities of the place.

"Do you see the fair young man moving round the table on the left?" he asked.

"Good-looking fellow with a scar on his face? Yes. Who is he?"

"In his way a very interesting person," was the earnest reply. "That is Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern. They say that he is the most popular young man in Germany."

"I was reading about him only last week," the other observed. "One of the papers was saying that he had modeled himself entirely upon our present king when he was the same age—goes in for all sorts of sports and is always doing something thoroughly democratic."

"If Germany is ever foolish enough to discard her republic, there goes the future kaiser," his companion announced.

The young man in question made a very slow progress through the rooms. He seemed to meet friends constantly, with most of whom he stopped to talk, and although he seemed scarcely in the place for the purpose of gambling, he occasionally risked a twenty-franc piece at the tables. Presently he passed out of the ken of his two observers and, having completed a tour of the rooms, as though in unsuccessful search of some one, collected his hat and cane in the cloak-room and strolled out. He was greeted everywhere with a great deal of attention, and he was obviously exceedingly careful to return all salutations. As soon as he was alone, however, a somewhat supercilious smile took the place of his apparent bonhomie, and he yawned once or twice on his way to the Sporting Club. Here he was again received with great consideration, and made his way up the stairs into the smaller roulette rooms. An elderly man of exceedingly aristocratic appearance moved eagerly toward him from one of the little groups. Prince Frederick welcomed him with a sigh of relief.

"I have been looking everywhere for you, General," he declared. "Come and tell me the news."

They moved off toward the bar.

"There is no news," the older man replied. "He has not yet arrived."

Prince Frederick seemed disappointed. "I thought the boat was due in yesterday," he observed.

"It was due," the general assented, "but it has been delayed by bad weather. I am expecting to hear at any moment that it is in the bay."

The two sat in a corner of the bar. In his own country the prince always drank beer. Here, he called for a mixed vermouth. They spoke for a little time upon incidents connected with his journey. It seemed that he had only reached Monte Carlo that afternoon.

"It is a relief," the general declared with a little sigh, "to be in a place like this, my dear Frederick, where you and I can meet and talk openly. Even though I was your tutor, people whisper in Berlin if we are seen much together, especially since I became a member of the Government. You have been as busy as usual, I suppose?"

Prince Frederick yawned. "Last week," he confided, "I opened two flower shows, unveiled a statue, opened a tennis tournament and played in it myself, took the chair at the Flying Club dinner, and joined in the parade, opened a new fencing academy and fenced the first bout and attended two commercial banquets. Not so bad considering that I had to show up at the bank each day. Lucky no one knows how little work I really do there."

"It is not necessary for you to do any at all," the general reminded him. "The directors are all our friends and members of our party."

"All the same," the young man declared, sipping his vermouth, "it is a grind. That dear English relative of mine in whose footsteps I am supposed to be treading, only had to pose as a democrat in sentiment—not to transform himself into a bank clerk. I hate the atmosphere of these places. The camp and the barracks are my home."

His mentor smiled tolerantly. "You must remember, my dear Frederick," he said "that until our day comes it is as well for you to keep your military instincts as far as possible in the background. The bourgeoisie would be shaking their heads and likening you to your respected great-grandfather if you gave them the opportunity. That side of it will come later. All that I pray is that I may live to see it."

"All good Germans must pray for that," the prince agreed, lighting a cigarette. "We have become giants of commerce during the last twenty years simply because we are a great people and bound to succeed in anything we undertake—but at heart we are a military nation."

The general looked at his pupil and smiled fondly. "It is the blood," he murmured.

"TELL me the latest news of this man Samara," Frederick demanded a little abruptly.

The general frowned. "It is very hard to speak of the matter coolly," he declared. "We Germans made Russia a military nation. We trained their men, we made their guns and flying machines, we taught and equipped them from conscript to general. We constructed a mighty engine of destruction ready for our use when the time came. It suited the old régime. The soldier was the only man who could be sure of regular food and comfortable living, and every one wanted to be in the army.

"Now, under the new order, everything is changed. Industrially and agriculturally Russia is forging ahead, and now, without warning to anybody, Samara calmly announces to the world that he desires to reduce his army to the proportions suggested by the League of Nations and insists that he needs the soldiers for industrial developments. His representative in Moscow told Baron Gusman plainly a few days ago that the Russian government no longer recognized any military understanding with Germany."

"What about our own cabinet?" the prince asked eagerly. "How do they take the matter?"

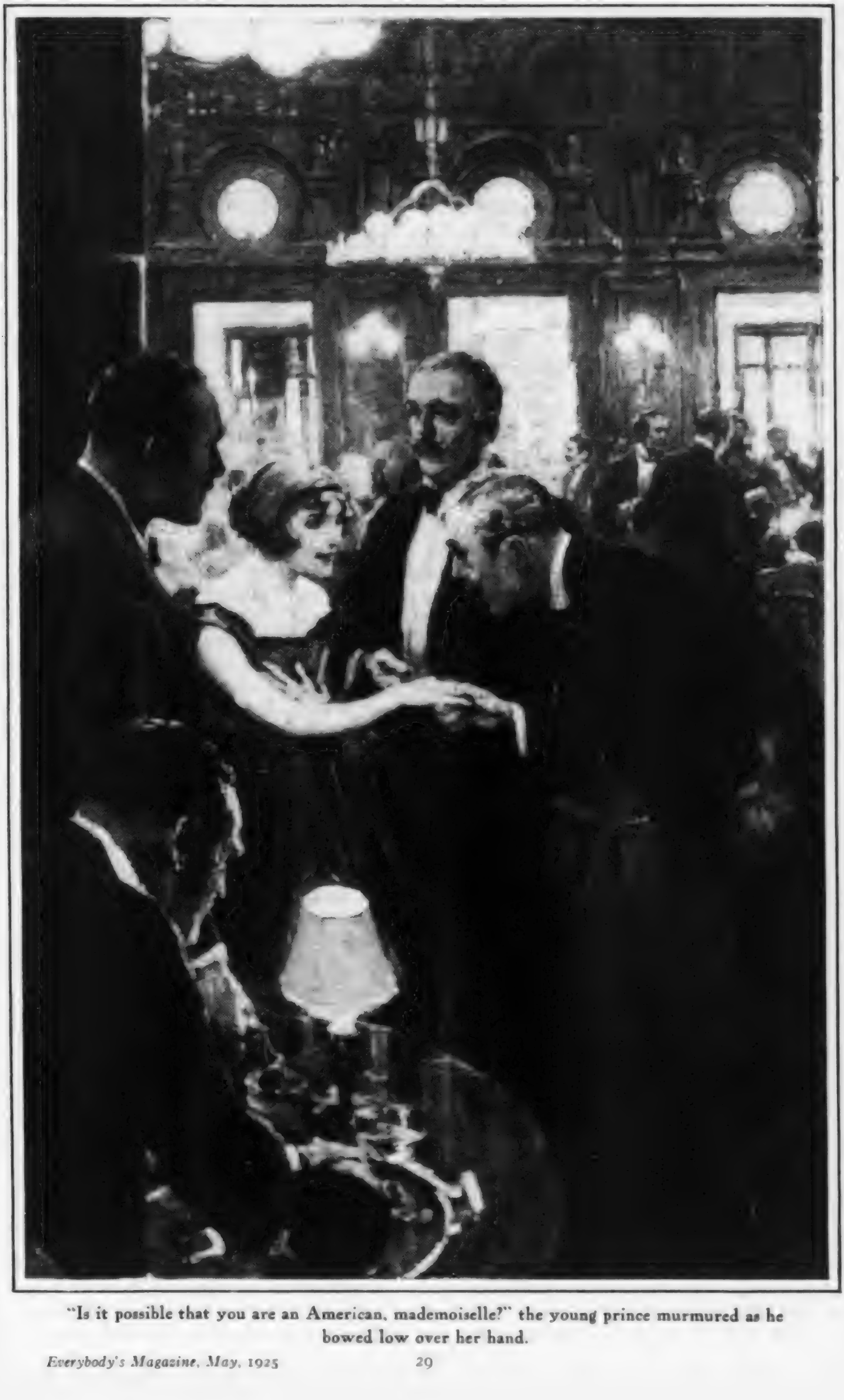
"Their attitude," the general replied, "is, so far as it goes, satisfactory. I am here as a special envoy, instructed to protest formally against any further demobilization of the Russian armies, to remind Samara of our previous agreements, and to demand an explanation of his present policy. Except for a handful of Socialists, the motion in favor of my mission was unanimous."

"They say Samara is a great autocrat," Prince Frederick reflected. "Suppose he takes high ground—"

His companion was silent. He glanced around the room and, although they were in a retired spot, he dropped his voice.

"Then he may bring the day of fulfilment nearer," he said. "Samara's hold upon the people is as yet unproved and propaganda in the army has already commenced."

A young man who had been standing upon



"Is it possible that you are an American, mademoiselle?" the young prince murmured as he bowed low over her hand.

the threshold, as though in search of some one, suddenly recognized the general and advanced. He bowed respectfully to Prince Frederick and handed a dispatch to the former.

"A wireless from the American boat, sir," he announced. "She is in sight and expects to land her passengers within the hour."

The general tore open the envelope and read its contents.

"Samara will see me at six o'clock tonight at the Hôtel de Paris," he announced. "Excellent!"

"Then, by dinner-time tonight—" the prince began slowly.

"By dinner-time tonight," the general ended for him, "I shall know what is at the back of Samara's mind. If he means to play us false—well, it will mean a complete reversal of our present foreign policy. It may lead to even greater changes."

A VERY beautiful and world-famous young woman looked in at the door and, recognizing Prince Frederick, smiled at him. He rose at once to his feet.

"I go to play baccarat with Mademoiselle," he announced. "We have an arrangement."

His mentor-in-chief laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Amuse yourself," he said tolerantly, "but remember—these little escapades are as well kept secret. There are gossips among our newspaper men and the Princess Freda is exacting in some matters."

The young man smiled. "Even my sainted prototype," he remarked, as he turned away, "had a weakness for beautiful ladies."

General von Hartsen played roulette for a time, took a stroll along the front, watching the great American steamer which had just arrived, and finally presented himself at the Hôtel de Paris at the appointed hour. Samara was engaged in the task of sorting his letters with Catherine's help. He received his visitor at once, however, shook hands with him and motioned him to a seat.

"Is this a visit of courtesy, General," he demanded, "or am I to consider it, in any sense of the word, official?"

"Friendly, if you please, sir," was the slightly formal reply, "but also official. I am the bearer of representations from the government in whose labors I have the honor to share, to the Chairman of the Council of the Russian Republic."

Samara shrugged his shoulders and turned away from the letters. He had the air of one preparing to receive battle.

"In that case, General," he begged, "pray proceed. I am entirely at your service."

The latter glanced courteously questioningly toward Catherine.

"The young lady?" he suggested.

"Let me present you," Samara interrupted. "General von Hartsen—Miss Borans, my secretary."

The general bowed low but his expression was still a puzzled one. His eyes remained fixed upon Catherine.

"Miss Borans," he repeated, "you will pardon me, I am sure, but I am under the impression that we must have met before."

"I think not," Catherine replied, shaking her head slightly.

"Unless you have ever been a visitor to the United States it is improbable," Samara intervened. "Miss Borans has lived there all her life."

"In that case I am doubtless deceived by a likeness," the general confessed. "You will forgive my adding, Mr. Samara, that our present conference must be a private one."

"I have no secrets from my secretary," Samara insisted. "Miss Borans is discretion itself. She would in any case handle any report of our interview which I might have to submit to my council."

Von Harsten bowed. "Very well, sir," he said, "I will proceed. I am directed by the ministers of the German Republic to ask you for full particulars concerning this proposed demobilization of a portion of your armies and to inquire further what change of policy such a step is meant to indicate. I think I need not be more explicit."

"Not the slightest need of it," Samara acquiesced. "Pray sit down. Smoke a cigar if you will, and I will tell you all about it. I will tell you just what my plans and hopes are for the future of Russia and incidentally, at the risk of shocking you, you shall learn my exact views as to the establishment of what I term mercenary armies."

The general's face grew a shade sterner. He put back the cigar which he had been in the act of clipping, and folded his arms.

"I am at your service, sir," he announced.

THE general listened with more or less patience to all that was in Samara's mind, and found the situation a great deal worse than he had expected. Toward the conclusion of their interview he became very angry indeed.

"I consider that the course of action which you propose, Mr. Samara, is entirely at variance with your obligations toward my country," he announced.

"I recognize no obligations toward your country," was the brusque reply. "I have from the first warned you that it was my intention at the earliest opportunity to rid myself of the great armies which my misguided predecessors, aided by you, brought into being. To have done so would have been my first action on coming into power had it been possible to find employment for the men. I have now made arrangements which will enable me to put half a million men on the land and half a million into industrial pursuits. Demobilization of the Third Army will commence the day I return to Moscow."

"And what about the First and Second?" the general demanded.

"I shall follow suit with the Second almost at once," Samara answered. "I look upon a trained army as an incentive to militarism, and I do not intend to maintain one. Since you are here I may as well inform you that my government will issue a proclamation before the end of next month requiring all officers of German nationality to resign their commissions and leave the country. A certain bonus will be granted to them—which will be a matter for later adjustment."

General von Hartsen found self-control an exceedingly difficult matter.

"You recognize, I trust, Mr. Samara," he said, "that such a proceeding will be considered by my government as an unfriendly act?"

"I'm not afraid that you'll go to war about it, if that is what you mean," was the prompt retort. "You won't waste your resources on us while England and France are upon the face of the earth. And to be perfectly frank with you, General, if it was ever in your mind to use any part of the Russian army for any German military enterprise, I can assure you that the idea was hopeless from the first. I do not intend that during my tenure of office the blood of a single Russian peasant shall be shed upon the battle field. There was too much of that in 1915 and 1916."

"You're more of a pacifist than I ever believed possible for a man of vigorous action, Mr. Samara," the general sneered.

"That may easily be so," Samara assented. "I'm a pacifist, at any rate, so far as this, that I do not intend to support a standing army. Every Russian citizen as he grows up, will be taught how to fight in his country's defense if ever it should become necessary. Beyond that—nothing."

Von Hartsen rose to his feet.

"You realize, Mr. Samara, I suppose," he said, "that even at home you will have to face something like a cataclysm. Your men do not wish demobilization."

"They will wish it fast enough when they see what I can offer them," was the confident reply. "America has lent me enough money to provide for a million of them, and Great Britain has asked me to explain my needs so far as regards the others. I am sending an envoy there tomorrow." . . .

The general bowed coldly to Catherine and to Samara without extending his hand.

"I shall report the issue of our conversation to my government, Mr. Samara," he announced. "It will probably make further representations to you."

He took his leave. Samara, with his hands in his pockets, walked to the window and stood looking out at the great front of the Casino and at the gardens below, whistling softly to himself.

"Well," he remarked presently, "it's a stupid game. German diplomacy is always so obvious. As though any one couldn't see that our armies were meant to be the cat's-paw to snatch out of the fire the chestnuts of revenge. Russia will never fight in my day except in self-defense."

"YOU might have civil war," Catherine reminded him calmly.

Samara swung round on his heel. "Civil war!" he growled. "About as much chance of it as the end of the world. The whole fault of the Russian as a politician is that he's too indifferent. That's why the Bolshevists were able to keep going as long as they did. The Russian wants peace and to go on as he is going. It is the aim of my life to see that he gets his wish. Miss Borans, listen to me for a moment, please."

"I am listening," she assured him.

"I hear from the chief of police that inquiries are being made in Moscow for suitable accommodation for pretty nearly all of your royalist friends. Well, I told them that they should be welcomed back to Russia and they are welcome, but I want it to be clearly understood that they must live and behave as ordinary citizens. They must recognize and observe the law and the government of the country."

Catherine inclined her head. "That seems reasonable," she admitted.

"I do not imagine for a moment that they are foolish enough to entertain the idea of anything in the nature of a definite conspiracy," Samara continued, "but if they did attempt anything of the sort, I should be quite powerless to help them. You will drop them a hint, perhaps."

"I will certainly do so if I think it necessary," she promised.

They parted a little stiffly; Samara to interview an emissary from Moscow, Catherine to spend a delightful hour wandering about the gardens and terrace of the little principality. She returned about eight o'clock, dined alone in the spacious salon attached to Samara's suite, and was standing at the window gazing rather longingly at the curving arc of lights along the terrace when Samara himself suddenly entered the room.

"You!" she exclaimed. "I thought you were dining with your man from Moscow."

"I have dined with him," Samara answered. "I have sent him back home tonight. General von Hartsen's attitude does not disturb me in the least, but it is necessary to prepare them at the War Office."

"And you?" she inquired.

"I have other affairs to attend to here and shall await your return from London. You will leave tomorrow morning, or rather, at mid-day."

"Do you wish to work now?" she asked.

"Don't be absurd," he scoffed. "Whoever works on the first night in Monte Carlo? I wish to take you to the Casino and to the Club, but you must be differently dressed."

"Indeed!" she murmured with a smile. "Well, you didn't give me much chance to bring clothes along, did you?"

"You must be able to do something," he insisted impatiently.

"As a matter of fact," she confided, "I bought a little black frock this evening while I was wandering about. It is very simple and I don't know if it has come yet."

"Go and put it on," he directed, "and meet me here in half an hour's time."

She moved toward the door, but on the threshold she looked back at him reflectively.

"I am not at all sure," she declared, "that I wish to go out with you."

He returned her gaze without moving a muscle.

"Because I kissed you and haven't apologized?" he asked.

She laughed softly. "Not quite that," she admitted.

"What then?" he demanded.

Her eyes mocked him inscrutably.

"What a baby you are when you leave your own world for a minute!" she said, disappearing through the door.

AN HOUR later they were seated side by side on a divan in the Sporting Club. People were standing three and four deep around the tables and play was for the moment impossible. Catherine, serenely beautiful, and with her intense curiosity concealed by the force of habit, was entirely content. Samara was moodily interested.

"But who are these people?" she asked him. "I've never seen such jewels even at the opera in New York. And the men—here at last is a new type."

Her companion smiled. "I am a poor showman," he admitted. "I have been here twice before in my life, but even I recognize some faces. There is Prince Artelberg, the Austrian Premier, the man who has very nearly made a country of Austria again."

"But the lady with him, in blue silk?"

"One seldom recognizes the ladies," Samara answered dryly. "The two men passing by are English. The nearer one is in the British Embassy at Moscow. The tall man with the gray beard and the small order is the King of Gothland. Alas, I am recognized! He is coming to speak to me."

The king detached himself from a small group of friends and crossed the room toward Samara, who had risen to his feet.

"A most amazing meeting!" the former exclaimed, holding out his hand. "You are on your way home from America, I presume?"

"I landed this evening, your Majesty," Samara replied.

"You will accept my heartiest congratulations on the success of your mission," the king begged. "But what about my cousins? What will they have to say to your altruistic efforts?"

Samara shook his head. "One can but hope," he said, "that they will appreciate the advance of the inevitable."

The king smiled. "I fancy that you will find General von Hartsen rather a handful," he remarked. "He has been here waiting for you for days, fuming like a madman most of the time. . . . Present the young lady, if you please."

"With your Majesty's permission," Samara replied. "Miss Catherine Borans, my temporary secretary—the King of Gothland. Miss Borans has been good enough to replace Andrew Kroupki, who was taken ill in New York."

The king bowed and held out his hand.

"To be secretary to Mr. Samara," he said, "is to stand behind the curtains of the diplomatic world. I congratulate you, Miss Borans."

"I find the work exceedingly interesting, your Majesty," she observed.

The king looked at her curiously, "you are American?" he inquired.

"I have lived there most of my life," she answered.

"It is curious," he continued, "you have a family likeness to some friends of mine. You stay here for long, Mr. Samara?"

"Perhaps four days, sir," was the reluctant reply.

"I am at the Hôtel de Londres," the king announced. "If you have the leisure, please sign your name in my book."

He bowed to Catherine, nodded to Samara and passed on. The two resumed their seats.

"I am quite sure," the former said demurely, "that Miss Loyes would have come up to your room herself if she had realized that it might mean a trip to Europe and an introduction to a king."

"There is worse to come," Samara muttered, glancing apprehensively at two approaching figures. "I thought this fellow was never going to speak to me again."

General von Hartsen clicked his heels, bowed and held out his hand.

"Mr. Samara," he said, "my young friend here desires the advantage of a personal acquaintance with you. Will you pardon my taking this opportunity? Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern—Mr. Samara."

SAMARA studied the young man with interest as he shook hands. The latter smiled frankly.

"My name may convey to such a world-famed democrat as you, sir," he observed, "unpleasant reminiscences. I have resumed my title, it is true, but I am a German citizen and a faithful subject of the Republic. I work in a bank. The general tells me that you have just arrived from New York."

"This afternoon," Samara assented.

"You will do me the honor, perhaps," Prince Frederick continued, "of presenting me to the young lady."

Samara acquiesced without comment.

"Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern—Miss Borans of New York."

"Is it possible that you are an American, mademoiselle?" the young prince murmured as he bowed low over her hand.

"I have lived there all my life," Catherine assured him.

"And this is your first visit to Monte Carlo?"

"My first visit to Europe."

"It is amazing," he murmured. "You stay for some time here, I hope?"

Catherine was imbibing the atmosphere of diplomacy.

"It is uncertain," she replied.

"You will permit me, perhaps," he ventured, with another bow, "to show you the rooms? Mr. Samara will not object?" he added, turning to the latter.

"By all means."

The two young people strolled off together, without waiting for Samara's somewhat surprised acceptance of the situation. General von Hartsen watched them critically.

"Magnificent!" he exclaimed. "The blue-blooded aristocracy of the east and the red-blooded aristocracy of the west. Mademoiselle is doubtless the daughter of one of these great American millionaires."

"Mademoiselle's income, so far as I know," Samara replied dryly, "is thirty dollars a week, the salary I pay her. She happens to be my secretary. I thought I had mentioned the fact." . . .

"WHAT the hell's this?" Samara demanded, as he entered the salon on the following morning and found a cardboard box the size of a washing basket on the table.

"Roses," Catherine replied, raising her head from the interior which she had been examining. "The most wonderful I have ever seen in my life. For me, too! And from a prince! I'm glad I came to Europe!"

"A prince who is also a bank clerk!" Samara scoffed. "Believe me, the world has finished with princes."

"This one was very pleasant," Catherine confided. "He invited me to spend the greater part of today with him."

"You told him you were going to London, of course?" Samara asked quickly.

"I certainly did not. Ought I to have done so? I rather thought that was between us."

Samara nodded his approval.

"They wouldn't suspect you of being a real envoy," he observed. "That is one reason why I am sending you. Still there is no need to run unnecessary risks. You have had your coffee?"

"An hour ago," she answered, "and packed my things, and walked on the terrace."

"With your princeling?"

She shook her head. "He was invisible," she sighed. "Of course it may have been that he didn't know that I was going to be there. He spoke of a party at the Carlton last night, wherever that may be. Perhaps he was late."

"Perhaps he was," Samara agreed.

"It seems a little unfortunate," she murmured, as she poured out the coffee, "that I am leaving Monte Carlo so soon. I was never so great a success at the Hotel Weltmore in New York. On my first day here, a king has told me that I reminded him of some friends of his, and a prince has invited me to luncheon and sent me roses."

"Just as well you're leaving," Samara growled. "Your head would soon be turned."

"I am very well balanced," she assured him.

"How about your memory?" he asked. "I hope your flirtatious successes haven't driven the serious matters out of your head altogether."

"Absolutely," she confessed. "What am I going to London for? I am sure I don't know."

"In that case you had better stay behind," he suggested gruffly.

She laughed in derision. "My dear master," she said, "there isn't a word or a point of the whole thing that isn't in my brain. As an envoy I'm going to be the greatest success of modern times. I shall be irresistibly logical, delicately persuasive. What sort of a man is the British Prime Minister, please?"

"A married man with a large family and serious views," Samara warned her; "and as for politics, he is as sincere a democrat as I am."

"I won't expound my little hobbies about government, then," she promised. "What a pity you aren't coming with me!"

"If I could make the journey," he replied coldly, "there would be no need for you to go."

"I hope you won't get into trouble here while I'm away," she sighed. "It really is a most attractive place."

"There is seldom any trouble here except of one's own making," was the somewhat curt rejoinder. "Monte Carlo is a sort of sanctuary for all the criminals of the world. They meet here and exchange notes, but they look upon it as a sort of neutral ground. To attempt evil against a man in Monte Carlo is almost a breach of etiquette."

SAMARA accompanied her presently to the railway station. Her bag had been sent on and they walked through the gardens, bathed in sunshine, along the terrace and waited a few moments for the elevator. Catherine, humming softly to herself from sheer despair at her companion's silence, was looking amazingly beautiful. It was as though all the youth of her nature had responded to the entrancing change in the conditions of her life.

In her neat traveling dress, with the great bunch of roses in her hand and her almost lizardlike absorption of the glinting sunshine, she seemed to have imbibed with it the joyous spirit of her surroundings and the passing hour. The drabness of cities and of cramped labor were things utterly discarded. She was a young princess of the coming day; eager yet gracious. Samara, on the contrary, was not altogether at his best. His clothes, as was often the case, were ill brushed, his hair and chin needed the services of a coiffeur. There was a streak of red in his eyes, too, and a shadow underneath them, as though the night had gone ill with him. Catherine, as the elevator rattled up, paused in her humming and looked at him critically.

"Were you late last night?" she inquired.

"Moderately. I had a great many dispatches to read."

"You had no bad news from Moscow?"

He shook his head. "None at all. Politically everything seems to be reasonably quiet. It is from outside all the disturbance will come for some time. Our own people have scarcely realized yet the change which has come into their lives."

They were alone in the lift. She drew a little nearer to him.

"You are afraid of Germany, perhaps?"

He brushed aside the suggestion scornfully.

"I am afraid of no one," he answered. "A certain clique of statesmen in Germany will be furious and will start an agitation against us. I doubt whether they will do any good. As I have already warned you, they will watch London closely. That is why I prefer to send you there in this manner, without letters or documents, rather than to make you the bearer of any written proposition." . . .

"You are placing a great trust in me," she reflected, as they watched the approach of the train.

"There is no success in life possible for any one who has not learned to trust," he declared.

The train came thundering in. Catherine's seat was found without difficulty. Samara stood in the corridor for a moment looking in at her.

"You are a strange person," she said, holding out her hand; "rather a bully and terribly unreasonable sometimes, but I shall be glad to see you again. Promise me that I may come back here, that you will not send word for me to go direct to Moscow or anything of that sort."

He smiled. "A statesman is always at the mercy of circumstances," he reminded her, "but the Duma is not summoned to meet until the week after next and my arrival in Moscow before then would be premature. I think you may take it that I shall be here, awaiting your return, on Saturday night."

He backed away at the last urgent call, and stood on the platform while the train rolled out. There was nothing to be seen of Catherine, and he gazed carelessly into the passing windows. Suddenly he gave a start. A young man who had boarded the train at the last moment was leaning breathlessly down from the platform of his car, waving his hand to a friend. As he recognized them Samara's frown grew blacker. An entirely new and unwelcome sensation sent him back to the hotel with a curse upon his lips.

CATHERINE was by no means a secretive person, but she had received a letter that morning of which she said nothing to Samara. As soon as the train had started she took it from her handbag, spread it out and re-read it, a smile of amusement upon her lips. It was dated from the Hôtel de Paris on the preceding night:

> MADEMOISELLE!
>
> The roses which I shall send you tomorrow as soon as the shops are opened bring too tardy a message. I cannot rest tonight without sending you a line to beg for your gracious permission to see you at the earliest possible opportunity, to assure you that since the moment we met, only a few hours ago, every other thought has been driven from my mind, every other woman's face into which I have ever looked has become a blank. Please believe in my sincerity as I believe in you. There is no one so adorable in the world!
>
> Forgive my presumption! It comes from a heart overfull! I count the minutes until I shall see you again! FREDERICK!

The smile deepened. Catherine laughed softly to herself. She tore the letter into small pieces, held her hand out of the window and let them go fluttering by. Then, while her handbag was open she looked at herself in the little mirror, handled her powder-puff lightly for a moment, closed the bag and leaned back in her place. For a time she watched with interest the unfamiliar landscape. Presently, however, she yawned, closed her eyes and dozed. She was awakened by the soft opening of the door of her compartment. She sat up and recognized the intruder with amazement.

"Prince Frederick!" she exclaimed.

He held out his hand. "Please not," he begged earnestly. "Even if you are angry with me let it be 'Frederick.' I am not—not exactly supposed to be here."

"I should think not," she agreed with decision. "Why are you?"

He closed the door and with some diffidence took the seat opposite hers.

"For the reason, mademoiselle," he confessed, "that I tried to express in my letter."

"But this is absurd," she protested. "I am going to England."

"I know it," he answered. "So am I."

She looked at him for a moment steadfastly. Then she glanced out of the window.

"You did not mention your intention yesterday," she said.

"I had no idea of it myself," he assured her.

"Do you wish me to understand that I am in any way connected with your journey?" she asked.

"I beg of you not to be angry, mademoiselle," he rejoined almost humbly. "You are the sole cause of it."

"Then, if you will allow me to tell you so," she said deliberately, "I think that you are mad."

"I think so myself," he acknowledged. "I thought so all night. I have thought so every moment since we first met. But it is, after all, a glorious madness."

SHE looked at him again steadily. He was a personable young man, dressed in gray tweeds cut after the English fashion, with shiny brown shoes of the shade she liked, fine linen and a well-chosen tie. His features were good, if a little over-reminiscent of an unpopular ancestry. There was weakness in his face but nothing much that was bad. So far as it was possible for any one to judge he seemed to be in earnest.

"Would it cure you," she inquired, "if I told you that this madness of which you speak is not in the least reciprocated?"

"That would be too much to hope for," he admitted. "I am content to wait. I have not had a chance to speak to you seriously."

"Seriously? How on earth could you be more serious?" she demanded.

He hesitated. He had sufficient tact to be aware that he was on delicate ground. Young American ladies, he knew, were used to a great deal of freedom, and this one had doubtless been a little spoiled. It was scarcely a case for rushing tactics.

"MADEMOISELLE," he said, "the idea of my devotion is a new one to you. You have not accustomed yourself to it. Will you remember at least that we do not meet as strangers? I may claim the privileges of a traveling companion?"

"I suppose there is nothing to prevent your doing that," she acquiesced, "but I might point out that the remaining three seats in this compartment have been engaged in my name."

"I shall leave according to your wish, mademoiselle," he promised. "The whole of the corresponding compartment next door is mine."

Catherine began to laugh to herself. He watched her questioningly.

"You see, it is my first visit to Europe," she exclaimed. "I had no idea that such things as this really happened."

"Far more wonderful things than this happen," he assured her earnestly. "Your American men, mademoiselle—pardon me, but they have no sentiment. They would not throw convention to the winds as I have done—abandoned all my engagements to follow the person whom I adore on the merest chance of a kindly word, to the one city in the world which I detest."

"I'm not so sure," she reflected. "Some of these American young men are fairly rapid."

He shook his head. "They are not capable of sentiment so intense," he declared.

"The one I am engaged to is quite headstrong when he is roused," Catherine remarked.

Prince Frederick glanced at her with a flash in his blue eyes which made him seem almost like a man.

"Engaged! You engaged!" he cried. "That is nothing."

"My young man thinks that it's a great deal," she observed. "He very much disliked my coming to Europe. He's on his way over here now."

"Who is he? What is he?" Prince Frederick demanded. "I must know all about him."

"He is called Nicholas," she confided, "and he is—well, he's very much what you are."

"A banker!" her companion exclaimed. "But that is only a blind. I have taken a position in commerce so as to establish myself as a German citizen."

"You have other ideas?" she asked him curiously.

He pulled himself up. "That is of no account," he replied. "When does this young man arrive? You're not going to England to meet him?"

"I don't even know what boat he is on," she declared.

The blue-liveried steward paused for a moment at the door with his customary announcement.

"*Le déjeûner est servi, madame et monsieur.*"

Prince Frederick rose to his feet.

"You will at least do me the great honor of lunching with me, mademoiselle?" he begged.

"I think I may go so far without indiscretion," she assented.

CATHERINE'S first impressions of England were delightful ones. She sat in the very comfortable armchair of a well-hung Pullman and looked out upon a patchwork country of tender greens, of woods bottomed with bluebells, spinneys and railway banks yellow with primroses, and orchards in which pink, waxy blossoms were already beginning to form. She was far too interested to notice the almost savage gloom of the young man who sat in the opposite chair.

"Mademoiselle Catherine!" he exclaimed at last.

She turned reluctantly away from the sun-bathed panorama of fertile country.

"My name is 'Miss Borans,'" she told him. "I do not appreciate the use of my Christian name."

"You are brutal," he declared.

She looked at him without kindness, scarcely even with friendliness.

"You are a very absurd and spoilt young man," she said. "You seem to fancy yourself aggrieved because I am not able to reciprocate in any way your very ridiculous feeling for me. You have no common sense. It is rather I who should be aggrieved. I did not encourage you to follow me. For the small services you have rendered me upon the train and the boat, I am much obliged, but I should have preferred being without them. If you wish to remain on terms of friendship or acquaintance with me, please abandon that expression and talk like a reasonable human being."

His face showed no signs of lightening; he seemed indeed thoroughly dejected and miserable.

"Why are you so cruel?" he begged. "Why can you not be just a little kinder? What is there repugnant about me?"

"You're not in the least repugnant to me," she assured him. "You simply do not interest me very much, and so far as my affections are concerned, they are engaged elsewhere."

He watched the flying landscape for a moment, as though he hated the speed it indicated. For the hundredth time he tried to find courage.

"I've always heard that you American girls are so practical," he said. "Why should you remain the secretary of a man like Samara? I am very rich, mademoiselle. I am very fond of travel. It is not my intention to marry for years. Reasons which I cannot confide to you forbid it. There are secondary titles belonging to some of my estates." He felt himself checked. "I always thought such things appealed to Americans," he mumbled as a gleam in her eyes almost froze the words upon his lips.

"They tell me that you have reestablished dueling in Germany. Is it true?" she asked.

"It is true," he admitted.

"I have a friend in America," she went on, "who is on his way over here now, who is supposed to be a very expert swordsman. I fancy that I failed to grasp your meaning just now. We are perhaps a little out of sympathy. I propose to read."

She buried herself in an illustrated paper. Her companion rose to his feet, kicked a footstool out of his way, and with scowling face retreated into the smoking-car. He ordered a drink and threw himself into a vacant chair.

"A little American typist!" he muttered. "A typist from the Hotel Weltmore!"

He struck the table with his fist. The few people in the car looked up in surprise. He only scowled.

"I want that drink," he shouted to the steward.

AT VICTORIA, Catherine smiled at him quite pleasantly, but she had already engaged a porter. As she was stepping into the taxicab, however, to which he insisted upon escorting her, she vouchsafed a few disconcerting words of farewell.

"You can tell your little friend," she said, "or General von Hartsen's friend, that I am very much obliged for the careful way he handled my belongings when he searched my bag, and you can also congratulate him upon his amazing stealthiness when he entered my compartment last night and went through my luggage. I should like to know where he got his master key from."

"I do not know what you are talking about," the young man exclaimed.

"That is possibly true," she admitted. "At the same time, the fact remains that I hate spies. You can also tell him this, that for the whole of the sixty seconds he was in my compartment, he was on the brink of eternity. I had a small revolver pointed at him through the bars of my bedstead and I am not sufficiently used to firearms for my finger to be absolutely steady upon the trigger, especially when one is traveling at fifty miles an hour."

"If what you have suggested has really happened," Prince Frederick declared eagerly, "I promise you—"

"You need promise me nothing," she interrupted. "I suppose if I undertake a political mission I must risk the consequences. I am only surprised that people think this sort of thing worth while nowadays. But let me tell you this," she concluded, leaning out of the taxicab window; "when the door first opened last night and I saw the covered light of the torch, I thought that it was you, and if I hadn't realized that it wasn't the second I did—well, I was too close to miss. Good-by!"

"A damned little American typist!" Prince Frederick muttered once more under his breath as the taxicab rolled off. . . .

CATHERINE drove to a hotel in a quiet but fashionable neighborhood, where she found a room reserved and a letter awaiting her, the latter a formidable-looking document, in a large square envelope, with a coat of arms at the back. She tore it open and read:

Downing Street,
April 21st.

DEAR MADAM:

The Prime Minister desires me to say that he has heard from Mr. Samara of your presence in London and, should you wish for an interview with him, he will be at liberty at five o'clock this afternoon, or at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning.

He asks me in the meantime to suggest that if by any chance the nature of your mission should have been mentioned and you should be approached by representatives of the Press, it would be as well for you to preserve the strictest secrecy as to any communications you may have to make.

Faithfully yours, dear madam,
FRANK S. PEACOCK
Private Secretary

Catherine glanced at the clock, summoned a maid and ordered a bath. In an hour's time she descended into the small lounge of the hotel. She was accosted immediately by a page carrying an enormous bunch of flowers.

"I am taking these up to your room, madam," he announced. "The gentleman who left them is over there."

Prince Frederick stepped eagerly forward. He was immaculately dressed in town clothes and he carried a silk hat and cane in his hand. His expression was anxious and wobegone. He had decided to change his tactics.

"I have ventured to call," he said, "to beg for your forgiveness in case you should have misconstrued anything I said this afternoon."

"Very well," she conceded. "I am willing to believe that it was, as you suggest, a misunderstanding."

"You are alone here," he went on eagerly. "You do not know London. I, on the other hand, am well acquainted with it. Permit me the great honor of offering you dinner and escorting you to a theater. I assure you that I will say nothing which could possibly offend, or even embarrass you."

Catherine hesitated. She was, after all, as fond of a good dinner and a theater as any girl of her age, and her hotel, though highly respectable, had a museum-like appearance. The young man saw her hesitation and hastened to pursue his advantage.

"Madame Ronet is singing at the opera," he announced, "or there are two good musical comedies. If you would not mind dining early we could have supper afterward, and perhaps dance if you care about it. I shall promise to be nothing but your attentive and most respectful cavalier."

"Very well then," she assented graciously "If you will find out from the hotel people at what time I have returned from the visit I am about to pay, I will be ready in an hour after that."

She passed on with a gracious little nod, and entered the taxi which the hall porter had called for her.

"Where to, madam?" the man asked.

"To the Houses of Parliament," she directed at random.

The man started off. At the corner of the street she put her head out of the window.

"Number ten Downing Street, please," she told him.

A VERY alert and polite young secretary, who had met Catherine in the hall, took her at once into the presence of his chief, Mr. Phillip Rossiter, erstwhile Foreign Minister, and now Premier of England. Mr. Rossiter was a middle-aged man of quiet, introspective manner. He welcomed his visitor with easy cordiality, and if he felt any surprise at her appearance he effectually concealed it.

"My friend Samara has already explained to me the circumstances to which I owe the pleasure of this visit," he said as he settled himself comfortably in an easy-chair opposite to hers. "Andrew Kroupki would have come, of course, but for his unfortunate illness. A very brilliant young man, that. I met him when I visited Moscow three years ago."

"Mr. Kroupki would have come, no doubt, with wider discretion," Catherine remarked. "I am sure you understand that I am here only as a messenger."

"Quite so," the other murmured. "All great men have their hobbies and aversions, and Samara's particular aversion has always been documents and diplomatic correspondence. We have come to an excellent understanding many times through an interchange of visits. I hope Mr. Samara has told you to talk to me quite frankly. I know all about his visit to America—in fact I am not at all sure that I did not put the idea into his head."

"Mr. Samara has told me certain things," Catherine acknowledged. "He has given me a certain insight into the arrangements he had made and why he had made them. Then he has gone on to tell me that whatever I know I may tell you. So you see I shall reply quite openly to any questions you ask me concerning his success in America. But I must warn you to start with that I am a newcomer, a stranger to all matters of diplomacy. I know nothing, even, of Mr. Samara's government. Considering that I have been working for him assiduously during the last three weeks it is amazing how little I know of him."

The Premier smiled. The subject of Samara was one which always interested him.

"Your chief is one of the remarkable men of this generation," he declared. "Fifteen years ago Bolshevism seemed to have its fangs deep into the very heart of Russia. It didn't seem possible for any one to prevail against it. Samara has worked miracles. Today Russia is, if not entirely herself again, well on the way toward reconstruction. Financially, industrially and economically she is making gigantic strides. Samara is daring, but he has the right ideas. Russia will be one of the great powers again long before his work is at an end. Personally—I have told Samara this myself—I see but one danger, and that is his tendency toward idealism. It is a great thing to mount the ladder, but one should set one's feet upon the rungs with care."

Catherine looked at her host intently.

"You don't believe in this demobilization scheme?" she asked quickly.

"Theoretically, I think it wonderful," he answered. "Tell me—I think I know, but still tell me—the Washington visit was a success?"

"Absolutely," she assured him. "Mr. Samara granted certain concessions and he has arranged for a loan of two hundred million dollars. The whole of the Third Army will be demobilized within six months and employment will be found for every soldier."

"Have you any idea as to the feeling amongst the militarists?" he inquired.

"So far as the Third Army is concerned, the men are perfectly willing to submit to disbandment," she replied. "The officers are largely German and they resent it. Still, Mr. Samara is very much in earnest. They will have to go, as the works are established, the mines opened and the machinery being shipped."

The Premier looked at his visitor with interest.

"You seem to have a very sound grasp of this subject, considering your recent connection with it," he said. "Are you an American, may I ask?"

She smiled. "I was born in Russia," she

admitted. "I have lived in America, however, all my life. It is my knowledge of Russian, of course, which has given me the opportunity to be of so much use to Mr. Samara."

He continued to study her with curiosity. "Your people were among the refugees?"

"Yes."

THE Premier turned to some papers by his side. Something in Catherine's tone told him that, so far as she was concerned, the subject was closed.

"What have you to say to me, Miss Borans?" he asked succinctly.

"Mr. Samara desires me to present this subject for your consideration," she said. "England was a heavy loser at the time of the Russian débâcle. There are many works and industries still languishing which were started with English capital and upon which he considers England still has in a way a lien. It is his wish to demobilize the whole of the Second Army as well as the Third. He therefore needs—it is Russia's greatest need today—a further development of her resources. He asks if you will appoint a committee of business men, preferably those connected with the various enterprises in which English shareholders have lost money, and send them over to treat with him in Moscow."

"To what end?" Mr. Rossiter inquired.

"To arrange with them," she continued, "for further considerable advances which will enable many of the industries and works which have been closed down to be reopened. Mr. Samara does not pretend that he will be able to pay in full those debts incurred in the days of the monarchy and ignored—in fact, repudiated altogether—by the Bolshevists. He considers, however, that some sort of a fund—"

"A sinking fund?" Mr. Rossiter suggested.

"That is the term he used," Catherine acquiesced. "A sinking fund could be established, so that in time a portion of the old debt could be repaid to English creditors by means of the renewal of the particular industries in which their money had been lost. They would, of course, in the meantime, be making the profits to which they were entitled on the new business."

"I see," the Premier murmured. "I gather from the nature of these suggestions that there is very little unemployment in Russia."

"Scarcely any," she assured him. "Nearly every industry is flourishing. All that the farmers need is more machinery and more workers. Mr. Samara has pointed out to me that the trouble in the demobilization of these armies is that quite half of the men are not attracted by the idea of working upon the land. That is why it is so necessary to provide them with other means of earning a livelihood."

"I quite understand," Mr. Rossiter said. "Did your chief suggest any particular enterprises connected with previous British undertakings?"

She drew a paper from her hand-bag.

"Here," she said, "is the list of industries brought to a standstill during the Bolshevist epoch, all of them launched in the first instance with British capital, which Mr. Samara thinks might be reconstituted. It is the only document I have brought with me."

Mr. Rossiter adjusted his eyeglass and read down the list. Then he rose to his feet and consulted for some time with his secretary, who was writing at the farther end of the room. Presently he returned to his place.

"I can not, of course, give you a definite reply, Miss Borans," he said. "But my impression is that there would not be the slightest difficulty in launching this scheme and finding the capital required. When do you return to Russia?"

"I am leaving here on Friday morning," she told him, "to rejoin Mr. Samara at Monte Carlo."

"Between now and then," Mr. Rossiter promised her, "you shall have the names of the committee I suggest and approximately the amount which the government will be likely to vote by way of a subsidy. I have now a question to ask you, the reply to which may not be in your knowledge. What military force does your chief intend to retain under arms?"

"I know nothing definite," Catherine replied, "but I believe that it is Mr. Samara's idea to do away with the whole of the military establishment of Russia."

Mr. Rossiter fingered his penholder.

"Your chief," he remarked, "does not believe in war."

"Not against Russia at any rate," she

assented. "He considers that Russia is geographically impregnable. Apart from that, he considers that the folly of warfare has been proved. I have heard him say that the war of Nineteen-fourteen was more disastrous to the allies who won it than to the German Empire, which lost it."

"Perfectly sound," Mr. Rossiter agreed. "The trouble of it is we have all learned something since then. I don't mind telling you this," he went on. "If the Germans had been victorious they would have found means of making England and France pay. They would never have been gulled by this higher economic doctrine and gone without their booty. Today, if there were war and Germany won, I have not the faintest doubt that she would know how to extract every penny of what she considered due to her and get full advantage of her victory."

"I do not understand economics," Catherine confessed. "I only know that Mr. Samara does not fear anything of the sort."

The Premier was silent for several moments. When he spoke again he seemed almost to be talking to himself.

"SAMARA is right up to a certain point," he declared. "The German Republic is not out for war. They know very well that the first breath of it would bring them internal division. To us, who watch such things closely, however, there are very dangerous symptoms in German politics. We should not be surprised any day to hear of a monarchical plot."

"But Germany is so prosperous under present conditions," she murmured.

"Precisely," the other rejoined. "But nothing breeds discontent quicker than undue prosperity. You must remember, too, that the racial and fundamental temperament of a nation can never be changed. Russia, France and Germany, all three of them, have the instinct among their peasants and bourgeoisie for monarchical government. So far as France and Russia are concerned, at any rate, I think that they are right. The Frenchman is too easily swayed. So long as he believes he is a part of the government, he is all the time tearing his hair and changing his mind. That sort of person always makes a loyal and submissive subject. The Russian peasant is in the same position for a different reason. He doesn't want his liberty. He doesn't want to be made to think for himself. He wants to be taken care of. He, too, wants to be ruled. Germany, I must admit, I am not so sure about. The German martial instinct seems to me to be the one great thing which might call back a kaiser."

"Who would he be?" Catherine asked curiously.

"Without a doubt, Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern," was the prompt reply. "He is the youngest son of the late Crown Prince and by far the most popular—reminds one rather of our own king, when he was young—a sportsman, a ladies' man, a democrat and a ruler. I don't know much about Prince Frederick, of course, although he manages to keep himself pretty well in the limelight, but I do believe that he is nursing the monarchy—playing to the people all the time."

"Am I to tell Mr. Samara from you that you think he had better leave that First Army alone?" she asked bluntly.

Mr. Rossiter took a cigarette from a box by his side and tapped it thoughtfully.

"My advice to your very distinguished chief would be to watch Germany," he said. "I quite agree with him that the German Republic is not bellicose. On the other hand, a German monarchy would at once seek to justify its existence by a war. Samara knows as much about this, though, as I do. Let him deal with the Third and Second armies as he will. I think I can safely promise him that the commission I send over to Moscow will be able to start industries which will absorb the whole of the surplus labor."

Catherine rose to her feet. The Prime Minister followed suit.

"I am happy to have had the pleasure of receiving you, Miss Borans," he declared. "Tell Mr. Samara from me that I greatly approve of his new diplomatic methods. You propose to remain in London, I understand, until Friday. Is there any way in which we can be of service to you?"

"None whatever, thank you," she replied frankly. "I have never been in London before. I shall very much enjoy doing a little exploring on my own account."

"I sympathize with you entirely," Mr. Rossiter concluded. "We will show you our greatest kindness—kindness in this instance, because it is a real deprivation—by leaving you alone. Present my compliments to your chief and don't forget that one word of warning—watch for a monarchist plot in Berlin. I do not need to tell him to protect himself in Moscow. . . . Peacock, show Miss Borans to her car."

CATHERINE, with the major part of her mission successfully accomplished, devoted herself, with an abandon which at times amazed her companion, to the spending of a thoroughly frivolous evening. They dined very well at Maridge's, saw the last two acts of a popular musical comedy and went on to a select and fashionable club restaurant, where the dancing was already in full swing. During the whole of the evening, Prince Frederick's behavior was entirely correct. He had adopted the attitude of the wistful, silent lover. He devoted himself entirely to telling his companion the names of the various notabilities by whom they were surrounded and relating anecdotes about some of them. With regard to himself he spoke scarcely at all and did not ask her a single question concerning her mission to London. On the three or four occasions when he was greeted or addressed by acquaintances his manner was genial and full of bonhomie. Catherine watched him with amusement.

"You seem to have a good many acquaintances over here," she remarked.

"I was at Eton for two terms and Oxford for a year," he told her. "I have made it my business to understand something of English life and English people."

"With what object?" she asked him pointblank.

His smile for a moment seemed almost sinister.

"We disinherited ones of the world," he answered, "have to keep friends with everybody. Unless I am strictly incognito I keep away from the court, of course. I was known over here as Frederick von Burhl, the name under which I started my commercial career in Berlin after leaving school. That is eight years ago, however, and today the prejudices against the aristocracy have declined."

"Do you believe," she inquired, "that imperialism is dead in Germany?"

He raised his eyebrows slightly. "Is that a question which I could possibly answer?" he protested. "Especially to the confidential secretary of one of the world's great democrats."

She laughed. "Please don't think that I have designs upon your secrets, if you have any," she begged. "I asked merely out of curiosity. There was an article in one of the reviews I read on the steamer which spoke of a reawakening of the monarchical impulse in Russia, Germany and even France."

"The writer was, I should think, well informed," Prince Frederick answered cautiously. "I believe the impulse is there. That is why Samara shows so much more than appears on the surface in setting himself to destroy the militarism of his country. A standing army is always on the monarchical side."

Catherine's attention was suddenly diverted by an amazing occurrence. She, like most others in the room, was watching the entrance of two people who were being received with every mark of distinction. One was a very beautiful woman, wearing a Russian head-dress and amazing jewelry. The young man with her, to Catherine's bewilderment, was Nicholas.

Catherine laid her hand on her companion's coat sleeve.

"Please tell me who these are?" she whispered.

Prince Frederick leaned forward. The woman seemed to be watching for a sign from him. His expression remained stony.

"That is Adèle Fédorleys, the ballet dancer," he confided. "She is half Pole and half Russian. Her companion I do not know."

"I do!" Catherine exclaimed in delight, as she watched the blank amazement in Nicholas's face change to pale fury. "He is quite a friend of mine."

"A Russian himself, by the look of him," Prince Frederick observed. "Tell me," he went on curiously, turning toward his companion, "how is it that you, who describe yourself as an American typist, are acquainted with a young man in this country who is in a position to know and entertain Madame Fédorleys?"

"A quaint coincidence," she admitted. "Almost as quaint as the fact that you two should be in the same room. That is the young man I spoke of—"

She broke off suddenly. Nicholas, having escorted his companion to their table, was crossing the room toward them.

"He is much bigger than I," Prince Frederick whispered. "I am terrified!"

"You are safe—here," she laughed. "I may have to smuggle you out the back way when you leave."

THE young man who had come to a standstill before the table certainly presented a somewhat formidable appearance. He seemed to have grown in stature and importance since he had left New York. The pastiness of his complexion was gone—replaced by a touch of becoming sunburn. His burly shoulders, closely cropped hair and a certain heaviness of feature suggested, in an indeterminate sort of way, the professional pugilist, an impression, however, which was modified by the keenness of his blue eyes, the levelness of his eyebrows and a certain breadth of forehead. He bowed very low and raised Catherine's fingers to his lips. Then he spoke to her hurriedly in Russian, his voice thick with anger.

"What is this? How is it that I find you here in London, alone with this young man? Samara is in Monte Carlo. I have news of him."

"Contain yourself, my dear Nicholas," she answered in the same language. "I am here on an errand for Mr. Samara, and my companion is an acquaintance whom you will be glad to know."

There was nothing in Nicholas's face to indicate any prospective pleasure. His expression was indeed forbidding in the extreme. Catherine turned to her escort and spoke in English.

"This," she said, "is a most extraordinary meeting. The strangest part of it, perhaps, is that you two should never have met and that it should be left to an insignificant person like me to make you acquainted. Who takes precedence, I wonder. Such things are a mystery to me in my station of life, so I must take my chance. This is Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern, better known in this country as Frederick von Burhl—Prince Nicholas Imanoff, whom I knew in New York as Mr. Ronoff."

Prince Frederick had risen to his feet. The two young men, after a moment or two of blank surprise, looked at one another with very natural curiosity. Then Nicholas extended his hand.

"I should have recognized you by your pictures," he said.

"And I you by your likeness to your House," was the courteous reply. "I understood that you had settled down in New York."

"There is only one country in which I shall ever settle down," Nicholas answered with some dignity. "I am on my way to visit it now."

"You are allowed to enter Russia!" Frederick exclaimed.

"At Samara's invitation. It is humiliating, but it is still a generous action. A great friend of my House, Kirdorff of Riga, is with me in London. My aunt, the grand duchess, and various others of my friends and relatives are following me by the French route."

"This is wonderful news," Frederick remarked. "Samara is a brave man, though. It seems to me that he has chosen a curious time to give you permission to return. I should like very much to talk to you, Nicholas. You will pass through Germany on your way to Russia. I should like you to meet some friends of mine."

"You have already, I see, met one of mine," Nicholas observed.

"I have met in Monte Carlo this young lady, calling herself then, Miss Borans, the private secretary of the Russian President," Frederick replied eagerly. "Her story is that she came from a typists' office in New York."

Catherine shrugged her shoulders. A faint smile flitted across her lips.

"After all, it does not perhaps matter very much," she observed. "You had better present me, Nicholas."

The latter turned to Frederick.

"You have the honor," he said, "to have made the acquaintance of the Princess Catherine of Russia, hereditary Grand Duchess of Urulsk. The princess, I may add, is my fiancée."

"I was," Catherine murmured sweetly, "but that young lady over there will take a great deal of explanation. I have lived so long in America that I have imbibed the bourgeois view as to this sort of proceeding."

An angry light flashed for a moment in Nicholas's eyes.

"The young lady is a fellow countrywoman and a great patriot," he said. "You remind me of my duty as host. I will return."

He bowed and turned away. Catherine watched him with a smile. The whole episode had appealed to her immensely. It was the young American woman who leaned back in her seat and laughed.

"Some shock for poor Nicholas!" she exclaimed.

"And for me!" Frederick groaned.

"I HAVE been an idiot," Frederick declared bitterly, toward the close of the evening.

Catherine smiled with amused tolerance. "I do not think that you are to be blamed," she conceded. "Why should you not believe what you are told? Besides, it is quite true that I am a typist. Not one of us out there had any money. Nicholas himself was selling bonds for a Wall Street stockbroker, and Alexandrina earned a few dollars making artificial roses. My engagement by Mr. Samara and my coming to Europe were entirely matters of chance."

"Is it true," he demanded, "that you are betrothed to Nicholas?"

"It is perfectly true," she acknowledged, "only I am not at all sure that I shall marry him."

"You must not," was the low reply. "You must marry me."

She turned to answer him with a jest and was amazed at his expression. He was pale and his eyes seemed to have sunken. The hand which clutched his wineglass was shaking.

"I have thought of nobody else since the first moment I saw you," he went on. "You have driven everything else from my mind. I followed you here to London blindly. I never dared hope that this might be possible. Now I realize that it is. It does not matter about money. I have plenty—and who knows, there may be a great future for us."

She listened for a moment to the music, gazing a little absently across the room. She had the air of looking through the walls into space. For a moment, indeed, her thoughts had strayed to the city of her dreams as it had been pictured to her, with its gilded roofs, its palaces and its hovels side by side.

"There is a chance of that, too, for Nicholas," she murmured.

"His chance is nothing to mine," Frederick insisted harshly. "For me the ground has been prepared, year by year and month by month. We have machinery at work. The time is close at hand. For Nicholas there are nothing but dreams. We have no Samara in Germany."

She rose to her feet. "You are too much in earnest," she whispered. "People are watching you. I believe they guess that you have proposed to me. It is most embarrassing. I insist upon dancing."

His hand as he touched her fingers was cold. No trace of color returned to his cheeks, even after the exercise.

"Are you not feeling well?" Catherine inquired, as they sat down.

"You can cure me with a word," he answered passionately. "Listen! Give me hope and I will return to Berlin tomorrow. I will send you a welcome from those who count. I will give you proof of what is to come."

"Is it possible that you are really in earnest?" she asked.

"In deadly earnest," he groaned.

Her real nationality suddenly asserted itself. There was a vein of cruelty in her race and it sprang into being. She leaned back in her place and laughed.

CATHERINE, after she had descended from the train at Monte Carlo, lingered for a moment upon the platform, dazzled by the sunshine. She had left London in a mantle of gray, Paris in a rain-and-wind storm, and now, after a long night in a *salon-lit*, she seemed to have stepped out into a new world of enchantment. The sea and sky seemed bluer than ever, the houses whiter and cleaner, the great stucco-like Casino more of a joke, resembling rather a child's toy dragged from its play-box, than a serious abode of drama; an arena for the most sordid of men's passions. And to add to it all, as she leaned back in her little victoria, the music from the distant orchestra at the Café de Paris came with real sweetness through the scented air. She sat forward and watched the people eagerly as she crossed the square. There was the same atmosphere about them all, a geniality and sense of relaxation which after many years of New York was strangely attractive to her. No one was in a hurry; every one appeared to enjoy not having to be in a hurry. There was plenty of time for the amenities of life.

It was a busy hour at the hotel, but each member of the staff seemed to find leisure to welcome her back after her brief absence. A reception clerk persisted in conducting her upstairs; the elevator boy's smile and bow made her feel that she had come home.

"Mr. Samara is walking on the terrace with some friends, madam," the clerk announced. "I think that he scarcely expected you until tomorrow."

Catherine nodded. "I meant to stay in Paris for a day," she explained. "I changed my mind. The weather was intolerable."

"Mademoiselle was wise," the man declared, with a farewell bow. "Yesterday we had rain but today, as mademoiselle sees, it is perfect."

Catherine unfastened her coat and glanced around the room before going to her own apartment. She noticed with tolerant disapproval that it was untidy—a little pile of discarded envelopes was upon the table, cigar ash upon the mantelpiece. Suddenly, however, the tolerance faded from her face. On the table was a woman's glove. An odor which she hated became more insistent—an odor of scented cigarets. There were some crushed flowers, too, upon the table. She rang the bell and pointed out the state of the room to the chambermaid. The woman smiled as she apologized.

"Monsieur was late last night," she explained. "And he only rose an hour ago. I did not wish to disturb him. I will now do all that is necessary."

Catherine went thoughtfully to her room, changed her clothes, bathed and rested for a time. She was conscious of a curious sense of disappointment and depression for which she could in no way account. She knew perfectly well that the private life of Gabriel Samara was outside her ken. Save for that wild moment on the steamer when he had kissed her—a moment only once alluded to since—not one of his actions toward her or any one else had indicated the slightest interest in her sex. When she had left she was quite sure that he had not a woman acquaintance in the place. And now everything betokened at least the beginning of an intrigue on his part.

After all, he was a Russian, a genius, a person of passion and temperament. There was nothing so strange about it, even from the point of view of her strict bringing up. Samara, as she told herself, lying on her bed with her hands clasped behind her head, was not of her world. Already she was beginning to realize the great forces which must eventually push them apart, the grim possibility that her association with him, her knowledge of his affairs, might before long become the measure of her usefulness to her own people, its betrayal the sacrifice she might have to offer to her own future. Was he perhaps in some respects different to her preconceived ideas? He was an idealist, without a doubt. His two books on Russia, written before his political prominence, every line of which she had read, were supreme evidence of it. But of his private life she knew so little. There was only her own observation and instinct to guide her. In the foreground of the picture of him which had somehow grown up in her mind that long glove, the crushed flowers, and the scented cigaret tips were like an ugly blur.

WHEN Samara returned from his walk he found Catherine seated at her typewriter, finishing the copying of some reports on which she had been engaged before she had gone. The room had been put in order and swept, the windows were wide open. On the table, however, the glove still remained and the little ash tray of cigaret ends. He banged the door behind him, came over to her side and shook her hand.

"Congratulations, my wonderful emissary," he declared, with one of his rare smiles. "I defied all diplomatic usage and you have justified me. An hour ago I received a cable with the names of the commission. They start on Thursday week."

"I am glad," she said.

He stood away from her for a moment, looking over her head out of the window.

"Everything is now in trim," he continued. "We leave here on Wednesday. The Duma is summoned for the following Tuesday. I shall announce to the representatives my intentions with regard to the army, issue an authorized edict the following day and commence demobilization the next week. Your adopted country people are prompt in their payments. We have already ten millions of American dollars in the Treasury and Argoff, my Minister for Home Affairs, is collecting a staff to open three of the southern silver mines."

"You have no fear, then," she inquired, "but that the Duma will agree with your policy?"

He laughed softly.

"Wait until you have lived a year in Russia," he said, "and you will not ask that question. The Russian of today is well-meaning enough, but he has little mind. The Bolshevists have crushed that. All that he asks is to be led."

"So that you are, in point of fact, almost a dictator," he remarked.

"So much the better for Russia if I am," he answered shortly. "No one knows better what is good for her. No," he went on, "all the opposition will come from outside, and who cares? They think I don't realize it. Idiots!"

She glanced at him questioningly. He walked to the mantelpiece, struck a match and lit a cigaret.

"They think I don't know what was at the back of their minds, those others who rattle their war sabers so foolishly!" he exclaimed. "Russian armies, poor patient Russian peasants, trained so zealously and carefully, not for their country's defense but to play the mercenary on foreign soil, to be pushed to the front in dangerous places, that German soldiers might be spared! They are furious there. Von Hartsen scarcely leaves me. He has tried everything—argument, menace, bribes."

He ceased his restless perambulations and came back to her side. His eyes fell upon the glove and the little ash tray of cigaret tips. He scowled at them for a moment.

"The evidences of my profligacy," he remarked.

"I had noticed them," Catherine acknowledged. "I am rather sorry that she smokes scented cigarets."

"Foul things," he assented. "Still, I suppose women must have their whims."

She recommenced her typing. He stopped her with an impatient protest.

"Don't do that!" he exclaimed. "It's time for lunch. We'll go out somewhere. Get your hat."

"The persuasiveness of your invitation," she murmured, "almost carries me off my feet."

"Don't be sarcastic," he replied. "I want to talk to you."

"What about?"

He pointed to the glove. "About that."

Catherine knew that she was losing an opportunity but nevertheless she yielded. She should have laughed at the idea that the presence of the glove might in any way interest her. She did nothing of the sort. She went meekly to her room, put on her most becoming hat and walked by Samara's side across the square.

"So you want to know about the glove, eh?" he demanded.

She looked around at the people sipping their apéritifs under the umbrella-tented tables and listened for a moment to the music.

"Does it need an explanation?" she asked. "I suppose you're very much like other men and the atmosphere of this place is a little relaxing."

"Why don't you find it so then?" he demanded. "Nothing seems to change you. From whom did you inherit your magnificent imperturbability?"

She smiled. Her own moment had arrived.

"How you misjudge me!" she sighed. "As a matter of fact I have been behaving rather badly myself."

"That young princeling!" he muttered furiously. "I saw him on the train."

She nodded. "He went all the way to England entirely on my account," she confided. "Not only that, but I supped alone with him at Mario's in London."

"A NICE sort of diplomatic envoy you are!" he scoffed. "Did you take him with you to Downing Street?"

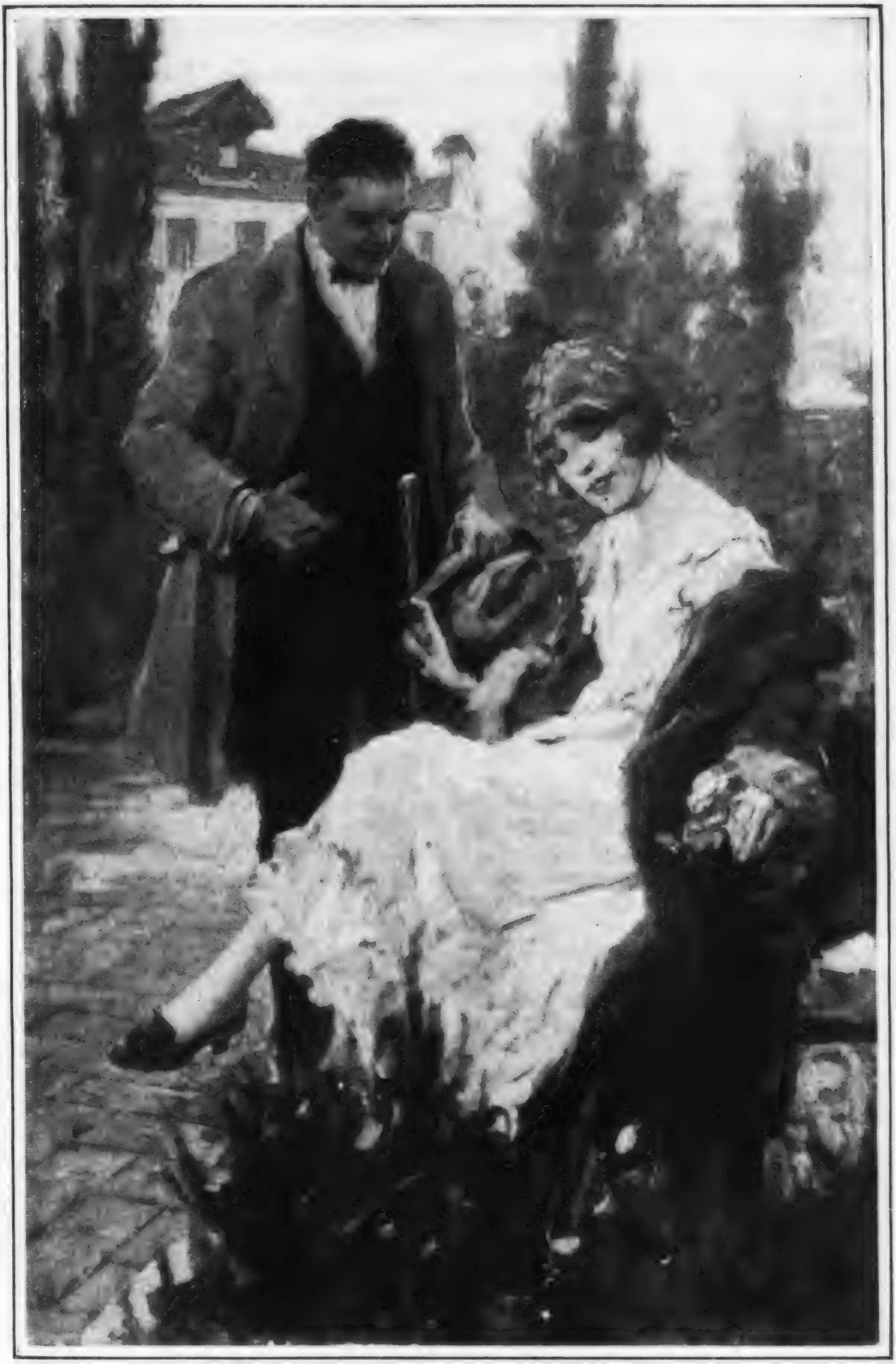
"Don't be absurd," she replied. "I devoted to him only my moments of frivolity."

Samara remained for a few moments in a moody silence. They had reached the end of the arcade and were promptly ushered to a table on the glass-enclosed balcony of the famous restaurant. Catherine took off her gloves, looked out at the sea, listened to a violinist in the street below. Notwithstanding a slight feeling of depression, she felt very kindly toward the world.

"The glove belonged to Olga Kansky, première danseuse in the Russian Ballet here," her companion confessed abruptly.

Catherine smiled. "A Russian!" she exclaimed. "Naturally she had to pay her respects."

"She came for nothing of the sort," he declared brusquely. "She had supper with



"I will give you," Samara said, "the first rose from my garden." Catherine accepted it with a smile.

me here. I invited her to my sitting-room afterward."

There was a slight change in Catherine's manner. Her tone became almost haughty. She looked at her vis-à-vis with slightly upraised eyebrows.

"There are some situations," she reminded him coldly, "which do not require explanation."

"This one does," he retorted. "Especially to you, as you are in a measure responsible for what happened."

"Surely my own sins—" she began.

"In plain words," he interrupted, "I found that I was thinking a great deal too much about you. I don't want to think too much about any woman, especially one of your type. I have my own theories about the place for women in the world. I meant to carry them out. That is why I invited Olga Kansky to supper."

"And did you—carry them out?" she asked breathlessly.

"No."

"Why not?"

"A ridiculous attack of sentimentality," he confessed. "Just memory—a windy night, the boom of the sea, a moment of accursed opportunity. . . . I wanted to kiss Olga Kansky—I couldn't."

Catherine laughed, without changing a muscle of her face—laughed inwardly, conscious of an unreasonable joy.

"You kissed me quite nicely," she reflected demurely.

"That was the madness of a moment," he declared. "It will not happen again."

"I wonder," she speculated.

"You need not. I am no woman worshiper, but I know how to tabulate them. You suit me as a secretary. You don't fit elsewhere. That's the end of that! Olga Kansky leaves for Nice tomorrow. Tell me about the Prime Minister."

Their conversation drifted away from the personal note. As they lingered over their coffee, however, she brought it back.

"You are rather a fraud, you know," she said.

"How?" he asked suspiciously.

"You allot women their place in life—a very inferior place—and when you meet any one who deserves something better you pretend not to recognize the fact. You know very well that I was not made to be any one's plaything. Why am I not worthy to be a companion?"

He watched his glass filled with old brandy—held it out for a double portion—then he selected the strongest cigar he could find. Before lighting it he leaned across the table.

"I find you companionable," he admitted. "I treat you as a companion. If I needed a plaything I should look elsewhere."

"In plain words," she observed, "when you seek recreation you walk in the garden where only exotics grow, like Olga Kansky."

"I hate allegories," he growled. "In plain words, I intend neither to marry nor to give any woman that place in my life which might be the equivalent of marriage."

Catherine was looking out of the window. The train from Paris had just arrived. The busses were beginning to rumble up the hill. A young man passed, seated in a little carriage. Catherine smiled. She had recognized Prince Frederick.

"My fate," she murmured, motioning downward. "I really believe he has followed me back again. I adore perseverance and, after all, I suppose even a kaiserin gets some fun out of life!"

THE end of luncheon brought a pleasant surprise to Catherine. At the end of the arcade a powerful motorcar was standing, into which Samara ushered her.

"You have seen nothing of this country," he said. "I have a fancy to take you to a spot of my own discovery."

"This makes me very happy," Catherine acknowledged, with a grateful smile. "Like every one else in my adopted country, I am a born tourist."

They turned a little toward Mentone, mounted to the clouds and paused for a moment at the summit of a parapeted road. Catherine looked downward at the panorama below with amazed delight; Samara, with unassumed indifference.

"It is wonderful," he admitted, with a note almost of tolerance in his tone. "Here and there in wilder countries nature has distorted landscape into even more majestic outlines, but here comes the touch of humanity to interpose a strange element. It is man with his craving for luxury, not his desire for the beautiful, who has dotted these hills with villas, planted exotic gardens and brought his yachts through the storm into the harbor there. Marvelous, of course, beautiful in its way, but with the slur of paganism everywhere, the note of theatricality, from the gingerbread structure of the temple of men's greed, to the lights and shadows which play beneath the clouds on the mountains behind. . . Perhaps you don't see it as I do. Why should you? Now I shall take you to the place I love."

"Sometimes I wonder," she said thoughtfully, as they went on their way, "whether I am not more of a pagan than you. You keep your real self so well hidden. Those gardens, for instance, to which you pointed a little scornfully: I worship their masses of color and forget the twenty gardeners who toiled to produce the effect. And against that blue sea even the Casino itself appeals to me—perhaps to my sense of humor more than anything else, but it pleases me."

He looked at her with an unusually kind smile.

"There is the difference of a whole cycle of humanity between us," he reminded her, his voice growing a little sad as he proceeded. "You are younger even than your years—you have lived behind the high fences. I am older than mine, because life came to me in strong doses before I had time to decide how to deal with it."

They descended to the sea level, passed through Nice with its amazing, flamboyant loveliness, through the old, mysterious, disreputable, picturesque town of Cagnes, and turned to the right along a narrower road which wound its way into the bosom of softer hills than those which towered down upon Monte Carlo. Here were vineyards, and many small homesteads, planted around with olive trees, each with its strip of meadow and arable land, and a sheltered corner in which grew a little clump of orange and sometimes lemon trees. The soil became redder, the grass greener. To Catherine it seemed that there was a gentler quality in the air, something more languorous than the keen atmosphere of the rockbound principality. Then the car drew up at a bend in the road a few kilometers above a quaint, tumble-down stone village. Samara alighted.

"Just a yard or two this way," he invited.

She followed him along a short cypress grove, scrambled up a knoll fragrant with the perfume of late mimosas, and uttered a little cry of delight. A short distance away was an old white stone house, half villa, half château, with close-drawn green shutters and a familiar tower at either end. It faced due south and one side was covered with wistaria and drooping magenta bougainvilleas. Such garden as there had been had run riot, but there was still a wealth of roses growing promiscuously with the olive trees and the mimosas right up to the edge of the vineyard which stretched toward the valley. Inland, a range of fertile hills with many small villages clustered in their clefts rose to the skies, and beyond towered the pale outline of the snow-capped Italian Alps. A vista of meadowland and vineyard, of small homesteads and picturesque groups of farm buildings, stretched down to the old town of Cagnes itself, standing upon its pedestal of rock, unreal almost in the gray perfection of its rugged outline. And beyond, the great foreground of the Mediterranean, blue and placid. Something different from the usual light of admiration crept into Catherine's eyes as they wandered over the old house and lingered lovingly upon the tangled masses of flowers.

"I DID not understand you a few minutes ago," she confessed. "I do now. I think that this is more beautiful than anything I have seen."

He smiled. "I am not sure," he confided, "that there is not poison in this atmosphere. I came here by accident, with a fever of fighting in my blood, scheme after scheme forming in my brain—for Russia, for the world—and before I had been here half an hour I felt something of the spell of the lotus-eaters numbing my brain. I found myself speculating—wondering whether it was all worth while, how far one must travel through the toil of life before rest came. It was because this place spelled rest for me—spelled it differently, spelled it without ignominy, spelled it with beauty instead of sloth. Peace, after all, is the end of all of us."

She was more moved than she had bebelieved possible.

"It seems so strange to hear you talk like that," she murmured. "You, Samara, the man of action, the ruler of a nation, with a great fight looming up before you."

"Have I ever told you?" he asked. "I

forget. I believe in God. This might be His compensation for failure."

She was too bewildered to speak, but curiously conscious of an utterly untranslatable emotion.

"And so," he went on, as Catherine seated herself on a bench, "I did the strangest thing I have done in life. I found this place for sale and I bought it. I signed the papers this morning. We walk down my own avenue, and I will give you," he concluded, stooping and picking a rose from a bush which had clambered halfway up an olive tree, "the first rose from my garden."

Catherine accepted it with a smile.

ON THE afternoon of the day fixed for their departure Samara was wandering aimlessly around and Catherine was screwing up her typewriter in the sitting-room, when the floor-waiter knocked at the door and announced a visitor. General von Hartsen, who had followed close behind the waiter, entered and bowed stiffly.

"Come to bid me a last farewell, General?" Samara asked.

"You will excuse me, sir, but my visit is not to you," was the unexpected reply. "Pending an official response to the queries which I have placed before your government, I have nothing more to say."

"Not to me?" Samara repeated. "To what, then, do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"My visit is to Mademoiselle," the general announced.

Catherine looked up from her work a little unwillingly.

"To me?"

Von Hartsen bowed once more. "If Mr. Samara permits," he continued, "I shall be glad of five minutes' conversation."

"What sublime effrontery!" Samara exclaimed. "Do you want to suborn my secretary before my face?"

"My visit is not political," the general confided, "but I confess that it would give me greater satisfaction to pursue it in your absence."

Samara was in an evil mood. The trivial business of preparing for departure had irritated him and he had other causes for self-dissatisfaction. He turned on his heel and, without a word, marched through the connecting door into his bedroom.

"Mr. Samara is not in a very good temper," von Hartsen observed. "He would perhaps be in a worse one if he knew the object of my visit."

"Won't you sit down?" Catherine invited.

The general shook his head. He moved, however, to the farther end of the room, and stood upon the hearth rug. One could almost hear the clank of his saber as he walked. Without uniform he seemed somehow an unreal figure.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I am an ambassador."

"The prince?" Catherine asked calmly.

"Precisely."

Catherine continued her task of opening the drawers and collecting her oddments of stationery.

"You won't mind my doing this while you talk, will you?" she begged. "Our train leaves at three o'clock."

"It is part of the object of my visit," the general pointed out, "to persuade you not to take that train."

"But I must," she replied. "All our arrangements are made. We are going straight through to Moscow."

"I am in hopes that if you give a favorable hearing to my mission," the general persisted, "you will not go to Russia at all."

"A plot?" she inquired.

"Scarcely that," he protested. "On behalf of my ward, Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern, I have the honor to ask for your hand in marriage."

Catherine shut her dispatch box with a click.

"You know all about me, then," she said coolly.

"Prince Frederick has confided in me," the general confessed. "I should like to point out to you that my young ward is making you this proposal entirely from reasons of sentiment. He is, if I may say so, very greatly attracted. Since your first coming here, he, whom I have always found so docile, has been entirely unmanageable. It was the wish of his friends that he should marry Princess Freda of Bavaria. Up till now he has been acquiescent. Last night, extravagant though his language was, he convinced me that the scheme had better be abandoned."

"Is she anything like her pictures?" Catherine asked.

"The princess is personable," was the somewhat brusque reply.

"She doesn't look it," Catherine declared. "I should have said that she was fat."

"It is to be admitted," the general acknowledged, "that she has not your Highness's claims to good looks."

CATHERINE frowned angrily and glanced toward the door through which Samara had disappeared.

"Please do not address me in such a way again," she requested. "My name is Catherine Borans and I am a typist whom Mr. Samara has brought home from New York. I prefer for the present to remain as such. As for Prince Frederick's offer, I beg leave to decline it."

"To decline it?" the general exclaimed in amazement.

"Precisely. Life in Berlin as the wife of a banker would not amuse me."

The general looked quickly around the room as though to be sure that there was no possibility of their being overheard.

"Mademoiselle," he said, dropping his voice a little, "there are great things afoot in Europe. It is not Prince Frederick's destiny to remain forever a banker of Berlin. There is no man in this world with such a future!"

Catherine shook her head doubtfully. "I do not think that you will ever be able to restore the monarchy in Germany," she declared.

Von Hartsen smiled with supreme confidence.

"Mademoiselle," he confided, "it is as good as done."

"You dazzle me," Catherine observed, with irony so faint that her visitor was unable to detect it. "Kaiserin of Germany! It is hard to refuse."

"It is impossible to refuse," the general persisted.

"Nevertheless—"

He stopped her. "Let me complete my mission," he begged. "For the first time Russia and Europe generally have been made aware of the existence of Prince Nicholas of Imanoff. That young man has never apparently visited his native country. He is unknown to the people—unregarded. Prince Frederick, on the other hand, has been brought up in his own country. He is a democrat, seemingly, and one of the most popular young men in Germany."

"You are trying to point out to me, I suppose," Catherine said, "that whereas Prince Frederick has every chance of becoming Kaiser of Germany, Prince Nicholas has no chance whatever of becoming Czar of Russia."

"That is the truth," von Hartsen insisted. "Prince Nicholas has no hold upon the affections of his people and except in the army there is no royalist following in Russia. The only chance Prince Nicholas would have would be if he remained friends with Frederick. Then, in the future, who could tell what might happen?"

Catherine smiled. "Subtly put, General," she acknowledged, "but I am afraid that I can do no more than repeat my first answer."

"Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed.

"You see," Catherine continued, "notwithstanding the Russian blood in my veins, I was brought up and educated in America. I have earned my own living there. I have caught something of the spirit of the country. I should not dream for a moment of marrying any man for whom I had not affection. Prince Frederick has inspired me with no such sentiment."

The general looked at her steadfastly. "It is strange," he muttered, "to hear one of your race speak in such a fashion."

"Times change, General," she reminded him. "Today the pomp of life appeals less; the desire for true living appeals more. I am a Royalist by instinct and conviction, but I should never share even a throne with a man whom I did not love."

"This Nicholas—" the general began.

The typewriter and dispatch box were there, but Miss Catherine Borans has vanished from the face of the earth. It was the princess who corrected her visitor.

"General," she pronounced, "the interview is at an end. I hope that the next time I meet Prince Frederick this matter will have been forgotten."

SAMARA came out from his room, wearing his traveling coat and carrying his hat.

"Still here, General?" he said. "You'll have to excuse us. The omnibus is waiting below."

A gleam of malice shone in the general's face. He realized Samara's ignorance.

"I thank you for your consideration, Mr. Samara," he said. "I need not detain either of you any longer. I am sorry to tell you that my errand was in vain."

"What errand?" Samara demanded.

"I am here on behalf of Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern," the general explained. "I was the bearer of a proposal of marriage which I regret to say that her Highness has declined."

"Her Highness?" Samara repeated. "What the devil do you mean?"

Von Hartsen's expression of surprise was excellently simulated.

"It is incredible," he exclaimed, "that you have not discovered the identity of this young lady! I have the honor, then, to present you to the Princess Catherine Helena Zygoff, Grand Duchess of Urulsk, Countess of Borans, and hereditary ruler of the lands of Utoff."

Samara stood perfectly still. His eyes were fixed upon Catherine's face. She smiled at him very pleasantly.

"Rather too bad of the general to give me away like this," she complained. "I hope you don't mind."

"One accepts the inevitable," he answered coldly.

"Her Highness has just refused the hand of Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern," the general continued. "It would be interesting to learn her future plans."

Catherine picked up her dispatch box, and laid her fingers lightly upon Samara's arm.

"My dear general," she said, "I must congratulate you on your acquaintance with my titles, which you have remembered more or less correctly, but I am also Miss Catherine Borans from the Weltmore Typewriting Bureau, temporary secretary to Mr. Samara. I think," she went on, looking up at her companion, "we ought to hurry, or we shall miss the train."

"You mean that you are coming with me?" Samara demanded.

"Coming?" she repeated. "Of course I am. We mustn't forget to send them up for the typewriter. Good-by, General."

Von Hartsen gazed across at her fiercely.

"So you are a renegade," he muttered.

Once again he sank into insignificance at her parting glance.

"I have been brought up in a country," she replied, "where a girl learns to think and act for herself and men do not insult women!"

NICHOLAS with his guide and counselor, Boris Kirdorff, stood upon the balcony of an apartment on the third floor of Berlin's premier hotel, and gazed downward at the swaying crowds. In the distance a flag was flying from the roof of the Reichstag building. There was a general air of holiday-making. Nicholas, who was a little bored, yawned.

"Do you know," he asked, "why von Hartsen was so anxious for us to stay over for the day?"

"I have an idea," his companion admitted. "I am not sure. That is his knock, however. He will probably explain."

He stepped back into the room and met the general, who had just been ushered in. The three men stood together upon the balcony, the newcomer in the middle. The pavements below were crowded. Policemen of decidedly military appearance were riding backward and forward. Occasionally a car passed down the middle of the guarded way, greeting now and then with a faint murmur of applause.

"You would like, perhaps, to understand," von Hartsen said, "why I have persuaded you to remain here till tomorrow morning's train to Moscow. Well, I will tell you. I will tell you because there is something which I wish to point out to you which is in a sense an allegory to all of us. Today, as you may know, is the opening of the Reichstag."

Kirdorff nodded. "So much as that, we know," he admitted. "To follow your politics, however, seems almost impossible. You appear to have seven parties struggling each against the others, of which the Socialists, who were once the strongest, have become the weakest. How can you form a coherent government with such a muddle?"

Von Hartsen smiled. "You ask a sage question," he said. "Many of the shrewdest men in Germany are asking the same. The parties will not coalesce. Only one unification is possible!"

"And that?" Nicholas asked.

"Wait," was the prompt rejoinder. "Now listen. Here is the automobile of Herr Mayer, the leader of the Socialist party, once the most popular man in Germany. See today how the people greet him."

The car rolled by, the man who was its solitary occupant—elderly, gray and worn—looking neither to the right nor to the left;

seated with folded arms as one who faces an ordeal. Here and there was a faint murmur of applause; here and there distinct hisses. Of enthusiasm there was none at all.

"There passes a grave danger," von Hartsen declared. "Twenty-five years ago, during the aftermath of the Great War, the Socialists came rapidly to the front in the country. They reached the zenith of their power in 1930. Since then their influence has steadily declined. Today they are a forgotten force. Watch again. Here comes the automobile of the President. He is fairly popular. Is there a single real shout of welcome? Watch the people's faces. Who among them cares whether that man comes or goes?"

The car proceeded on its way. Many hats were lifted to its occupant, but, although there was all the time an undertone of applause, again there was no enthusiasm. These were the involuntary marks of respect paid by a law-abiding nation to its ruler. A dozen other cars passed by containing deputies from various political parties. Some were greeted in silence; some with a few courteous salutations; one or two with a little hum of interest. Then von Hartsen leaned forward.

"The Prime Minister of Germany," he announced. "The leader of our government. He rides to his doom—his political doom, that is to say."

Again hats were raised here and there, but a stony silence prevailed. Then came a new type of deputy—a general wearing his uniform, seated upright in his car, with his fingers resting as though by accident upon his sword.

"The Baron von Elderman!" von Hartsen exclaimed. "Listen! Watch the people!"

A little forest of heads uncovered and hats waved. This time there was a real, hoarse murmur of applause. More than once the general saluted in response to the greetings.

"The Baron," von Hartsen explained, "is commander-in-chief of the German armies. He is also deputy and leader of the Monarchist party—so far as we permit it to be known that there is a monarchist party. Does it seem strange to you that republican Germany should find applause for him that it denies to all others?"

"Republican Germany is a misnomer," Kirdorff declared. "The soul of Germany has never been with the republic."

"You speak well," was the other's solemn admission.

A few more cars passed, attracting varying degrees of notice. Then, from the distance came a volume of welcoming voices, swelling into a roar of enthusiasm. At last the people were moved. Down the middle of the avenue came a single open motorcar, in which was seated a young man in uniform, alone.

"FREDERICK!" Nicholas exclaimed. "What does he do here?"

Von Hartsen smiled. "He was elected a deputy only a few weeks ago," he explained. "He is coming to take his seat."

"But in uniform!" Nicholas muttered. "I thought that was prohibited."

"He is wearing only the uniform of a cadet corps," the general pointed out. "Strictly speaking, it is against the law. We risk it. Listen to the people! What do you think that means?"

The applause was almost deafening, coming nearer and nearer like an inbreaking wave. Kirdorff's pallid face had become set and rigid. There was a streak of color in Nicholas's cheeks. The car passed like a flash below, and went on its way. Every moment the young man inside raised his right hand to the salute.

"For you," Kirdorff declared, "it can mean but one thing. It means the return of the great days. If Berlin can speak like that, what of the rest of Prussia?"

Von Hartsen smiled as he turned away from the window.

"It is finished," he announced. "We shall find wine in the farther room. It was to see what you have seen that I begged you to stay over. What is coming in Germany," he went on earnestly, "can come also in Russia. We are willing to help, but, like every one else in the world, we have our price. A glass of wine with you, gentlemen. Afterward I myself must go to the Reichstag."

They passed into an inner room where refreshments were handed round. When the glasses were filled, von Hartsen briefly dismissed the waiters.

"Listen," he began as soon as they were alone. "I do not promise that I myself can do for you, Nicholas Imanoff, what I have done for Frederick, but I can put you in the way of doing it for yourself. The seeds are already sown. Today in your first and second armies there is an active monarchist propaganda going on hour by hour. Samara knows it well enough—hence his hurried return from America. It is not altruism alone which has influenced him in this great scheme of demilitarization. It is because he knows that if ever the monarchy is restored to Russia it will be through the army. You have permission to return, Prince Nicholas?"

"Absolutely," the young man assented. "We all have—even Orenburg."

"It is a brave step of Samara's; I think a foolish one. Since you have the chance, however, show yourself openly everywhere. Ask Samara's permission to join the army. The whole machinery of propaganda is there. There is no reason why Russia should not revert to the only logical form of government within a year from today."

"You spoke of a price for your aid," Kirdorff reminded him.

"Naturally. Germany is suffering from peace. She needs war. We need your first and second armies before Samara can disband them."

Nicholas frowned. "How can one of my race draw his sword against France?"

"It might happen," von Hartsen replied, "that if you were not prepared to do so, you might have no sword to draw. But consider—the France of today has nothing in common with the France that was once your great ally. She is avaricious to a degree. Ascend the throne, reestablish imperial rule in Russia, and, before a month has passed, France will claim from you countless milliards, the whole debt of your country to her. The alliance, now that Austria has passed away, has ceased to exist. Discard it! Germany and Russia are natural and inevitable allies. Make up your mind to it!"

A cannon sounded from somewhere in the neighborhood. Von Hartsen finished his wine hastily.

"This is a great day for Germany," he concluded. "I must be there to see Prince Frederick take his seat. Deputy today; what he pleases by this time next year! Listen to me now and remember my words. The people will be ruled. It is the will of the people which is calling Frederick back to the throne of his ancestors."

He hurried off, leaving behind him a queer sense of excitement. Kirdorff's eyes were glittering. Nicholas seemed transformed.

"The will of the people!" he repeated ecstatically. "We, too, shall hear that call, Kirdorff! From Berlin to Odensk is not so far!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

Elegy

By William A. Drake

LIFE is a dream, and you and I
Only the figures of a dream:
Only the fancied shapes that seem
To flit across the troubled sky.

Like some gigantic child who makes
The creatures of his aimless show—
Puppets whose wit his guidance wakes—
To strut and strive and smirk and bow,

Life with sardonic gesture gives
And takes, unreasoning why or when,
The destinies of futile lives
And little hopes that might have been.

The Heart of Macloughlin

After All, Can Love Make Weak Men Strong? Teresa Thought It Could Until She Learned Wherein Lay True Strength

By Albert Richard Wetjen

HE WAS not popular. He was too sure of himself, too strong and lithe and arrogant. He boasted terribly and the unbelievable part of it was he made good his boasts. When Bruce Henry drove his smack through a half-gale and, with the aid of one man and a boy, dredged oysters and brought them in to ask his own price on the market, Captain Dan Macloughlin laughed and said it was nothing. Those who heard him reminded him that while Henry dredged, the rest of the oyster fleet had lain together, huddled at anchor, afraid to stir in the storming wind. And there were good seamen in the oyster fleet. But still Dan Macloughlin laughed.

And to justify his laugh he waited for the roughest day of the year and ran out a boat alone to the oyster beds and brought home nearly as many oysters as Bruce Henry had managed to gather with his extra man and a boy. No, he was not popular along the water front.

There were other reasons why the seaport of Wilmington disliked him. He not only made good his boastings, which was intolerable, but he also was in favor with the women. He had a way with him. It was said at one time he could have had his pick of the unmarried girls, and there were rumors of affairs with married women, too. All this was also intolerable, for Macloughlin was an outlander, a sea Gipsy, a deep-water sailor and therefore apart from the men of Wilmington, who were all coastwise seamen and fishers among the shallows.

But what the town thought did not worry Macloughlin in the least. He had the physique to discourage physical resentment. He owned his own ship and had sufficient capital to fight any other sort of opposition. He had also a rude and sarcastic tongue and men were afraid to get drawn into argument with him.

His eyes were gray and they could light up and twinkle so strangely that women were fascinated watching them. His lips were red and firm and could, when they chose, say things not at all rude and sarcastic; tender, wistful things. Wilmington, all male Wilmington at least, hoped he'd burn or break his neck or get drowned at sea. But trip after trip he came safely home and his profits mounted.

It was early one spring when Macloughlin became aware of Teresa Odell. She was very slender and dark and graceful. Her eyes were twin pools in which unbelievable and wonderful things stirred. Her lips were the toast of the coastwise cabins and of the saloons alongshore. Her father was Norman Odell, white-haired, drooling, once proud and rigid in his pride and the biggest shipowner along the coast. Now misfortune had broken him and his spirit was nigh gone.

Macloughlin met Teresa first by throwing aside a drunken sailor who was accosting her. She was very grateful and smiled and went on. There was no encouragement or promise of anything in her smile, but Macloughlin wanted what he wanted and knew what he knew. There were other women in Batavia, Sydney, Singapore and Bombay who could have warned Teresa. Something must be trampled on and broken when a sea Gipsy is squeezing life and playing the cards as they fall. That something is seldom a strong man like Dan Macloughlin. And women are left, and weaker men, to think that over.

Macloughlin saw Teresa next on the wharf when the oyster fleet was coming in. He was giving orders to the crew of his schooner about replacing some topping lifts and his splendid voice was ringing like a bell. The girl could not help noticing him. And she remembered he was not an oyster man, a man of shallow waters, but a sailor of the deep sea, running coastwise now in his own ship and growing wealthy, as wealth was measured in Wilmington.

One of Macloughlin's men, a stranger to the coast, resented something his captain said. It must have been the sneering tone under the sarcastic voice again, that could on occasion whip a man to a frenzy. This seaman, a burly, dark, unshaven fellow, was not whipped to a frenzy but he grew very angry indeed. He answered his captain in a way that was not the way of the ethics of the sea. And Dan Macloughlin began to handle him, neatly and with science. It must be said to his credit that he did not know Teresa Odell was watching. And it must also be said that if he had known he would have made the handling much more spectacular, his strong sense of the dramatic coming to the fore.

When it was over and the muttering, bloody seaman was tailing meekly on a rope again, Teresa breathed, awestricken, "It must be wonderful to be strong like that." Then Macloughlin turned and saw her standing by him with her hands at her breast and her deep eyes aglow. He laughed and removed his blue-peaked seaman's cap with a flourish.

"It is," he said simply.

THE light danced behind his gray eyes, for he saw the unbelievable and wonderful things in the twin pools gazing at him. He stood over the girl and laughed again and his teeth were white and strong and his shoulders were broad. He filled the world. He was the sea personified, mighty and brave and sure. She thrilled in every inch of her white body and her nineteen-year-old brain started to dream. So it commenced. She was the most desired and most unobtainable girl in Wilmington. Wherefore Macloughlin wanted her.

Being a sea Gipsy, he did not take women too seriously. They were only part of the game, the great game of life and love with death lurking always in the background. Macloughlin would have fought a man and lost, or faced death and gone under, with the same smile that flickered over his face when he kissed pretty lips. He accepted any odds, as he accepted a dull head after a night's outing. You had to pay for your fun and only a piker kicked. So he started to win Teresa Odell regardless of consequences. She would be an episode on the long road of adventure and life.

He went home with her that night, after the incident on the wharf, though she was waiting for Matt Burns to come in with the oyster fleet. Matt Burns and Teresa Odell had been playmates since they were small and shy, secret lovers since schooldays. Not that they had admitted it to each other. They were too shy of love for that. Teresa was still a child and Matt Burns was scarce twenty-four. Besides, his name was a byword along the water front and he was afraid to take the step that would link a girl's name with his. At least he loved Teresa that much.

But she had well-nigh forgotten him with the coming of Macloughlin, Macloughlin of whom all Wilmington was jealous. He met her father and the old man drooled and mumbled that he didn't want any strange sailors hanging round his daughter. Macloughlin only laughed and brought a flask of whisky to the house whenever he came. Thereafter old Odell did not object to his visits.

Teresa went with him of evenings through the unkempt gardens behind the Odell house, back of the town, or out along the cliffs and beaches within sound and sight of the surf. Occasionally he would play sweet tunes on a battered mouth-organ that became a splendid instrument in his hands. Sometimes the sweet tunes would fade and wild barbaric melodies take their place. That was when the night was very starry and the surf was loud. Macloughlin did not tell her he was thinking of other seas and other women then, other beaches and cliffs.

Once or twice at the Odell house he met young Matt Burns. The oyster seaman was tall and had curly fair hair. His eyes were blue and mild and he had a habit of making nervous movements with his hands. He was not the right sort to be a sailor. He was highly strung and was studying in his spare time to be a doctor. His name was a jest among the oyster fleet. He was a coward and Macloughlin swept him aside with contempt.

He could see, since he was not a fool, that Teresa loved Matt Burns. He could see also that she did not know it. It would be easy for him to draw her away. Already she was ignoring him. And Matt Burns was too shy to protest, too shy to talk to her even when Macloughlin was present; too afraid to fight for his woman. He was always afraid. Perhaps that was why Teresa loved him, deep down. She wanted to soothe him, kiss him and send him out to face the world again brave and strong.

But such thoughts went a-flickering while Macloughlin was near and his lips dropped crooning words of outlandish things. Tales he told of Yokohoma in cherry-blossom time; of Bombay when the great golden moon hung low over the city; of the palm islands of the south where the stars were big and close, and the surf was whispering on the pure white sand and the girls were singing by the lagoon, while men of all the sea drank and sang on the decks of anchored ships. She listened and stared at him with her twin pools of eyes; to her he was all she had ever dreamed. Matt Burns was far away, a wraith that hovered around and sometimes wrung a word from her.

Then, abruptly, Macloughlin was gone. He sailed on another voyage, a journey of some months this time. He left her on the cliffs one night, standing alone and holding the hand he had kissed and gazing after him. Everything he did was dramatic. She had not even known he was sailing until this moment. She watched his schooner flutter out of the harbor and lose itself in the starlight on the sea.

FOR a time Teresa was desolate. The sun seemed to have grown dimmer, the grass was not so green. There was no pleasure any longer in the cliffs and the beaches. But she found that the memory of Macloughlin passed very quickly and Matt Burns was always with her. The oyster fleet docked every other day and he had plenty of time on his hands. She did not forget the deep-water man, but being young she wanted company and Matt Burns knew just where the gulls laid their eggs and where tiny violet flowers were to be found in the crevices of the cliffs.

Summer came and glowed and swelled the trees into green masses with the fruit hanging heavily. The sea was calm and deep blue and always the sky was clear. Teresa found that Matt Burns was changing, changing in a vague way she could not define. He was milder than ever, more shy. But somehow he was different. He did not hold her hand with the same unconscious comradeship, he could not meet her eyes very steadily. One night he brought a shining ring and asked her to marry him.

He talked for a long time of his hopes and dreams. He was a coward. He knew it. He intended quitting the sea and studying hard and when he was a doctor he'd be able to give her everything she wanted. He was very humble and he loved her. She remembered she had always known him and encouraged him. She had planned great things for him. Her heart swelled and sympathy shook her. She couldn't bear to hurt Matt Burns. So he kissed her madly and gave her the ring.

Her father drooled when he heard: "Aye, marry him quick. His folks left him a bit of money and you'll be all right. . . . Never mind what they say of him; he'll make a good husband. He's safe and sure and that Macloughlin man would leave ye soon as a new face came."

Macloughlin! She had almost forgotten Macloughlin. It was five, no, seven months since he had kissed her hand that night on the cliff. It was true he would never be faithful. She had heard things since he went away, tales whispered among the women. Matt Burns was sure and steady. He would be a successful doctor. . . . But —but he couldn't play wild tunes on the mouth-organ or tell tales of dark-skinned naked girls dancing under the palms. And he couldn't dredge oysters in a gale by himself or break the hearts of women. He was safe, though, very safe, He'd be rich some day even if the water front did laugh at him now. And anyway she loved him and Macloughlin had only been a flirtation. She was happy, but aware of a vague irritation.

Macloughlin came home in the late autumn during a hurricane night. He should have hove to and waited for morning, but he drove his schooner into harbor. His crew had never seen him so uplifted, so reckless. He seemed to be consumed with the idea he must dock at once. And no sooner was he docked than he went ashore, as he was, oilskinned and seabooted, hurrying down the gangway and up the road to the town.

He was starting up the hill for the Odell house when he met Teresa coming from a long-fronted store. The main street of Wilmington was gloomy under the lamps and those abroad leaned against the slanting rain. Seaward the surf was growling and roaring and the masts of ships in the harbor tossed against a gray, moon-lit sky.

"Home!" shouted Macloughlin as he saw the girl. "I made a record trip to get home. There're four ships hove to outside, scared to come in; but I brought the schooner through. I wanted to see you again."

He laughed and held out his strong hands and all the old fascination of him flowed back to her. She caught her breath and stared into the dancing gray eyes and laughed, too. Their hands met. Macloughlin drew her into a doorway and turned back the collar of her coat so that he could see her face.

"I've brought you silks from the great city and a necklace fit for a queen—but hardly fit for you." He was lordly with his gifts. He scattered his wealth as he scattered his youth and his arrogant strength. He felt the girl trembling in his arms and control snapped in him. He said afterward it was the first time he had ever lost himself like that. He prided himself on handling women coldly and reasoning out every step he took. Now he found himself insanely crushing this girl to him and kissing her rain-wet lips. He was hungry for them. He had been thinking of them all through the long, coastwise months.

He released her after a while and held her off at arm's length. He laughed loudly so that a man passing by turned to look in the doorway.

"We'll go away from this place," said Macloughlin. "We'll sail south and west and on over the lip of the world until we find a place where the sun shines and the water's always blue. Just you and I. My ship never had a better mate than you'll be. Trading through the Marshalls and the Line Islands. We'll run the coast of Australia and go across to New Zealand and up again to Africa. If you want the world you shall have it, all you can see. . . . My God, and I thought I'd done everything worth doing!" He swept her close and kissed her wet lips.

She clung to him, trembling. Nothing was in the world but this man and mad, mad adventure. Her blood raced. She could already picture herself with windblown hair standing on the schooner's poop and watching palm islands lift fluffy tips above the sea rim—and her man, arrogant and strong and lusty, walking a lordly way across the earth.

Sanity returned at last. He caught her hand and for the first time saw the ring. He looked at it puzzled, then laughed. He took it from her finger and dropped it into her coat pocket.

"Only my rings now . . . Put it away."

She tried to protest. Shame flooded her. She was engaged to marry Matt Burns, mild, adoring Matt Burns who was safe and good and wouldn't leave her for any other woman or take her on mad trips across wild seas. She shivered and drew away. He did not notice it.

"I've a mind not to let you go tonight." His gray eyes were alight again and his lips close. The secret of life hung between their warm bodies. "I've a mind to keep you by me now and for always. . . . I never thought a slip of a girl like you, white and clean and young, could get Dan Macloughlin. Not a scrap of experience, nothing but innocence and clean lips. Thank God for that. . . . And this shall be my wedding night."

She tore herself lose and screamed, "No! No!" She beat at his breast with nervous hands and backed into the street. "I mustn't. I mustn't go with you now or any time. . . . Good-by!" She was gone, running up the wet street like a hare startled for its life. Macloughlin looked after her puzzled, and his hands twitched.

"A thousand miles south and in the old days I'd have gone after her and taken her aboard," he muttered. Then he brushed a hand across his eyes and shook himself.

HE WENT up the hill to the Odell house next morning and hammered on the door. Old Norman Odell opened it and stood tottering in the passageway.

"I want Teresa," said Macloughlin.

"She can't see you," quavered the old man. "My daughter's a decent girl and she can't be seeing strange men when she's engaged to be married."

Macloughlin kicked back the door and

strode into the house. He caught the old man by the throat of his shirt and shook him.

"You old fool!" he stormed. "I told you I was marrying her when I came back. And you let her get engaged to that blasted puppy of the oyster men. He's yellow clear through. Pah! Don't you want a man for a son-in-law? Oh, I heard! The story's all over town. Matt Burns is a laughingstock among the sailors. Afraid to go aloft in a swell, afraid to put out in a blow, afraid to fight! Can't even handle his own one-man-and-a-boy on his oyster smack. . . . Where's Teresa?"

"She can't see you," the old man quavered, greatly scared. "And you leave me alone. I know what's best for my daughter. Matt Burns's steady and don't drink an' his folks left him money. What do you think I can live on if she don't marry a steady man?"

Macloughlin flung him aside with an oath and stamped on through the house, flinging open doors and calling, "Teresa! Teresa, where are you?"

He found her at last in a little room all decorated in blue and white and with cool-looking flowers in white vases on a center table. She sat on the edge of a great white bed, her hands twisting a handkerchief and her dark eyes wide with fear.

"Teresa," said Macloughlin, his voice crooning and his eyes dancing and alight, "I heard about you and Matt Burns in town last night. It's not true you're marrying him?"

She said steadily, so steadily that she wondered at it: "It's perfectly true. I've always l-loved him. He's steady and he'd be faithful to his wife. And he's promised to look after daddy."

Macloughlin was speechless for a full minute. Then his eyes hardened and he burst out: "The old man's words you're talking, damn him! I'll pay him what he wants to live on. . . . Do you think I'm giving up the only woman I ever wanted because of a damned pup who's afraid to go aloft in a swell? . . . A yellow kid!"

"He—he's not a kid. And he wouldn't be a coward if they'd leave him alone. And I've always been going to marry him and help him to be a great man. And I'm afraid of you. You wouldn't want me after a while and you'd leave me. . . . And I heard Mrs. Walsey say you'd made fools of half the women in town."

"Damn Mrs. Walsey! . . . You wouldn't understand if I explained. But you're coming with me now to the minister's. Put on your clothes."

She cried, instead, trembling and fragile-looking. In spite of his anger and determination Macloughlin weakened. This was the only woman he had ever loved and her every mood was reflected in him. He came nearer to her and touched her head.

"I'll be very good to you," he whispered, "very good. But I can't let you marry Matt Burns. He's a coward and a coward's no good anywhere. He wouldn't even be a good doctor and they say he's studying for that. . . . He's a laughingstock in Wilmington. No other girl would have him."

"I wish you'd go away—go away," she sobbed, and did not look up. She had no great enthusiasm for Matt Burns but he would be safe, very safe. And how could she be sure that this sailor would be good to her? She hadn't known him very long and she'd known Matt Burns always. She was afraid to face life, afraid of what might happen. She wanted the fun and the glory but she was afraid of the payment that might be forthcoming afterward. She was not a sea Gipsy or an adventurer, only a very little girl who had never been away from home, and to whom love was a blazing fearful thing. She did not look up at Macloughlin lest she should rise and go with him, and she was afraid—afraid.

Macloughlin crossed to the door and then turned and looked back at her. It came to him that perhaps she really loved Matt Burns. There was no understanding women. He thought he had won her and he had in reality only touched her conceit and her desire to be courted.

He called back, very gently. "If you want him I'll help you get him. . . . It's all I can do. I'm sorry." When she finally looked up he was gone.

IT WAS late in November when the *Howgli* struck on the Wilmington Reef. The *Howgli* was a six-thousand-ton freighter that made the coastwise run, calling at the big towns and missing places as small as Wilmington. She was a day behind her schedule this trip and was pelting at full speed, trying to make up time, when she sighted the Wilmington Light far on her starboard beam. There was a terrific sea running and the wind was of hurricane strength. Still the *Howgli* was powerfully engined and would have battled a successful way to port had she not lost her propeller.

Up and down the coast then the wireless crackled. The lifeboat crew at Bradley Head, fifty miles down the coast, put out as soon as word came the *Howgli* had struck. But they could make no headway against the wind and sea and were tossed back on their own landing, half swamped. There was no ship at sea within seventy miles. From the beach at Wilmington the rockets from the helpless freighter could be seen bursting against the gloomy afternoon sky and scattering sparks down the mad wind.

There was no lifeboat at Wilmington, nothing but the oyster smacks, Macloughlin's schooner, a tiny sailing barge and the ancient harbor tug, whose engine power was far too small to buck the tremendous water. A few of the oyster men, led by Bruce Henry, who was the best sailor of them all, tried to get one of the smacks away from the anchorage. They got as far as the harbor mouth and then, some man losing his nerve as a white-topped sea foamed through the natural rock breakwaters, the helm swung over, the smack broached to and capsized. Two men drifted ashore on the wreckage. Bruce Henry came in with a roller, white and smashed and dead. Wilmington was horrified. The best sailor in the oyster fleet dead! Men looked toward the wreck, a dim shape in the driving spume, and shook their heads.

Macloughlin removed his hands from his pockets and cupped them over his eyes. He studied the bar between the rock breakwaters for a long time. He looked once to where the freighter still sent despairing rockets into the sky. Then he started for his schooner moving uneasily against the wharf. He saw Matt Burns among a knot of men and called to him.

The other came slowly, a little afraid, knowing he had beaten Macloughlin in the game for a woman. But Macloughlin was not thinking of that just now.

"I'm going out to that freighter," he said, smiling. "Want to come? I'll need just one man."

Matt Burns went white and backed off a step. He set his teeth and tried to look Macloughlin in the eyes. He failed.

"I wish I could, sir. I honestly wish I could. . . . I'd only lie in the boat and get in the way, though. I'm scared of the sea. . . . I've tried and tried but it's no use." His last words were the cry of a tortured soul. Macloughlin understood and his lips relaxed and he softened visibly. This boy wasn't so thoroughly bad after all, not so bad as Wilmington made out. Just needed confidence. Once the sea was conquered he'd find that courage come to him. Macloughlin remembered how much afraid he had been himself when ordered to go aloft for the first time.

He smiled. "Come with me and I'll make you a hero, Burns. Something for Teresa to be proud of." He seized the protesting and white-faced man's arm and dragged him along the wharf and onto his ship. Then despite protests he made him help get the whaleboat lowered and outfitted in readiness.

IT WAS a mad venture. Even a brave man would have been justified in refusing to go out in the shaking sea. Bruce Henry, the finest seaman in the port, was dead. And if he had failed to get out of the harbor, who else could succeed? But Macloughlin knew what he knew and besides he had lost the zest for life and his memories were growing bitter. He was growing tired of movement and adventure, tired even of love.

He had to pitch Matt Burns to the boat in the end, for that man was limp and shaking and could not stir. The sea was a very real terror to him.

"I'll make you a hero," Macloughlin shouted. "Better yet, I'll make you a man. She wants you and, by God, she'll have you, but I'll straighten your back first."

Wilmington did not know Macloughlin had put out a boat until the craft bobbed clear of the schooner and swung into the uneasy water of the harbor. Then they caught sight of the fragment of sail he had hoisted and saw Matt Burns crouching in the bows. At first it was unbelievable, but then Macloughlin came to view, steering the boat, and everything was plain. And yet not too plain. Matt Burns was not expected to act in such a surprising manner. He was a coward, and cowards do not go out to certain death to save a few illiterate able seamen from a raging sea. But Wilmington did not ponder long; it just went mad. The beach was a chaos of shouting men and women, tossing hats and waving arms.

Matt Burns crawled aft and moaned, "We'll never make it, never make it, sir. You can have Teresa if you'll only put back."

"Put back?" Macloughlin showed his teeth to the wind. "Get along for'ard there and watch the rocks. You're made, you fool, made! They'll never call you a coward again after this." But he had to kick his companion several times before he would go for'ard and watch for rocks again.

Even Macloughlin did not remember very clearly just how he took the whaleboat out of the harbor and alongside the *Howgli*. Probably he steered and handled the craft automatically. Between times he kicked Matt Burns and made him bale and shouted obscenity at him through the spray.

As in a dream Macloughlin took the rope the freighter hurled. All her own boats were matchwood and seas were sweeping her continually. It was fairly calm, though, in the lee where the whaleboat wallowed. The seven survivors of the freighter dropped down to the boat and Macloughlin put his helm over so that the wind touched the rag of sail and sent him shooting away into chaos again.

It was his sense of the dramatic that brought Macloughlin to himself and dispelled the dream feeling. He steered the whaleboat through the rock breakwaters and in to Wilmington harbor. The wind had changed and was on his quarter and he roared down the harbor with the speed of a destroyer. His eyes lit. His mouth curved and he laughed savagely so that the rescued seamen looked at him with awe.

He saw the thick gathering of people on the beach and drove the boat straight for them. He would finish the thing with a gesture, so that Wilmington should talk of it long after he was gone and forgotten. The boat soared on the rollers the changed wind was bringing to shore, sank in the shallow hollows. Then with a driving rush she beached herself in the wet sand not twenty feet from the first rank of the spectators. She remained upright and the rescued seamen staggered to shore.

Macloughlin remained at the helm and passed one hand over his eyes. He was very tired. All his strength had been expended. He had done the work of four men and Matt Burns lay on the bottom boards sloshing about in the water. He was incurable. He couldn't help it but he'd always be afraid. He had fainted.

There was a slim figure crossing to the boat, running, and Macloughlin swayed and laughed as he watched it. Well, he'd brought her man home safe enough. But she was hanging round his own neck and kissing him and saying foolish things. They must be foolish because they were impossible.

"I'm so glad, so glad, Dan. . . . You shouldn't have gone but I'm glad you did. I knew when you were out there with Matt that it was you I'd marry. . . . I'd have to marry you because I want you and I don't want to be safe and live here and—and never go trading through the Marshalls, along the Australian coast and up to Africa." She laughed and kissed him again. "I didn't even think of Matt when I heard you both had gone. . . . Poor Matt, you'll be kind to him, won't you, dear?"

HIS eyes were misty and he patted her dark hair. He put the past behind him, all the wanton women and the purple ports. He would stay on the Gipsy trail but his woman would come with him and they would share adventure together. Now he was hers, body and soul and heart.

He staggered out over the boat's side on to the sand. People surged about him, shaking his hands, clapping him on the back. He gestured to the boat.

"Get hold of Matt," he said thickly. "I couldn't have done a thing without him. . . . He's the best man you've got in the oyster fleet."

The crowd surged away and brought white-faced shivering Matt Burns from the boat. Macloughlin's word was good. They accepted Matt Burns as a hero.

Macloughlin laughed and showed his white teeth. Teresa patted his shoulder and was glad. Poor Matt!

"He can quit the sea and live on his laurels," said Macloughlin. "You tell him that, dear." He laughed again; the storm wind carried the sound across the harbor and all the sea knew that Macloughlin was tamed at last.

Homer Hunterfield

Fate Takes a Hand in Solving One of Life's Heart-Breaking Problems

By Stanley Olmsted

MID AFTERNOON on the Hunterfield farm. Alma Hunterfield stood toward the top of the high upper clearing where the woods spilled down like a bowery landslide arrested. The snake fence cut them off, blending into their boles with the effect of a clean line, soft gray and undulant.

Alma was shading the sun from her eyes with an uplifted hand. She asked herself: "What can be a-keepin' Homer?"

He had said he might be back for afternoon plowing, but she and 'Lindy had waited dinner an hour and then had eaten without him. These recent persistent journeys of Homer to Stoversville perplexed them; relentless Brother Homer, who never before in their remembrance had ungrudgingly left off his toil on the stubborn ridge-side; silent Homer, stiffening to premature age under the mountain summer suns, the cold driven rains, the winter snows, his rheumatism. He never spoke to his sisters other than in monosyllables. When he talked after nightfall with Jason, the hired man, about the masts and the cattle and the latest misfortune to the crops, they were tacitly excluded. They did not mind. Homer had been the responsible head of the family for many years now; and it was the way of men.

Mysterious, though—his regular crossings to Stoversville of late! Always he set forth in the dusk before first daybreak; often in a lashing downpour which might have stopped had he been patient. It had been so this morning. Only an hour or two of waiting and his team might have gone dry all the trail-looping miles of Atoah road and come into the county seat cozy with fresh-washed sunbeams.

But Alma had climbed to the top of the farm lands more in restiveness than because of any concern at Homer's delay. There was still no sign of him, though from where she stood the eye could discern outflashings of raw orange where the rural delivery came into a brief open place, at various grades on its windings over Atoah.

"There's something on his mind. He shows it. He ain't a-makin' them hard, rough trips to Stoversville and back every few days for nothin'. When he tells Jason it's to get the mule team shod, or bring back flour or sugar, or rubbin' oil for his rheumatism, it's just a blind. There's something on his mind."

The conjecture was a perfunctory thing to solace thoughts far afield of Homer; far afield indeed of any interest or identity touching the present orbit of Alma's being. She was twenty-two years old, but already for a year everything had seemed over. Life just left her behind, she felt, as it had left 'Lindy, who was nearer forty than thirty, and who never married and never would.

Below her the fields fell half plowed, in sheer convexities or concave scoopings. The lower ridge-side had been shorn too long and nursed too carefully by Homer and Jason to yearn for its vanished oaks and hemlocks, its coppiced tangles. Contours of the farm were mapped beneath her eyes, neat as a miniature done in painted plaster. It was as if an outstretched finger might touch the four-sectioned log house, with the geometrical oblong of vegetable and flower beds outlined in close-set twigs to the right. Behind was the clump of maples where, when summer came, Homer and Jason would sit in the shade for ten minutes after dinner.

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The trees were still too thinly budded to more than veil the back entry of the dwelling. Every five years or so Homer added a new log section at one end or the other; as if there were not enough already to keep him and Jason busy. But that was Homer!

The vegetables and flower beds were Alma's own. She and 'Lindy kept the twig pickets about it, setting new boughs, dried and straight, whenever old ones broke and fell away. But Alma did all the tending and wondered that it gave her no thrill, this year, to see how her lettuce and larkspur were sprouting. The square of her garden was no longer a red-brown, so smooth it had seemed almost glazed when looked down upon like this. It was brushed in thumb-sized spots with greenish film.

Where was that eagerness that had stirred within her at sight of it all, a year ago?

It had been only a little longer than that since the boy—she could only think of him so, though he was perhaps a little older than herself—had first stood before her. The last frosts of April had been thawing in the morning sun. The mountains had sent out their call to the birds.

He had met her outside the cattle gate where the sandy bottom-road ran beside the creek. He stopped dead in his tracks, and doffed his cap. Alma knew some men-folks did that, of course. She had spent two winters away; hoping some day to get her teacher's certificate at Tuohy where they had the Normal Academy with the one-room students' dwellings set about it like chickens around a mother hen. But the men-folks didn't take off their hats along Snowbird, nor much in Stoversville, and she had half forgotten how nice it seemed. She had never attained the teacher's certificate. 'Lindy had had enough of trying to get on without her, those two winters. . . .

Down on the sandy road one year ago, the boy had held his cap in his hand and asked her:

"Is this the Hunterfield place? Well, I'm marking time over in the old Kanuth lumber camp where they finally left off cutting the timber at the end of the world. I have my choice of a dozen abandoned plank palaces. I've chosen the one or two least likely to fall down on me while I'm asleep. I've come to buy a quarter ration of bacon—if you wouldn't mind selling it."

'Lindy had weighed out the bacon for him inside the smokehouse. She protested at taking the money. A little piece o' bacon wasn't nothin'. Homer and Jason jist kept on a-curin' more hog-meat every year till a lot of it spiled on their hands.

But the stranger wouldn't hear of not paying, and 'Lindy had finally accepted the silver pieces and bustled into her kitchen where hung the knitted sock in which she kept her ready money. He lingered on outside and engaged Alma in conversation, with eyes so clear, bright and steady on her face that often she had to drop her own. He too wanted to become a teacher, he told her, though he had worked until he was eighteen in tanning mills or planing mills or jobs in the city over in Tennessee. After that he had studied hard at school but he had a lot to catch up. He couldn't go on this year except by himself. He did not explain the obstacle, nor tell why he might be indefinitely at the old Kanuth camp—maybe until the end of the summer.

'Lindy tried to tell Homer about it, that night after supper. But Homer abruptly left his chair tilted back against the logs where he sat outside the house, and slunk down the road as he always did when worried or annoyed. "Whoever that feller is, Homer knows about him already," 'Lindy whispered to Alma. Jason sat on imperturbably beside the chair Homer had quitted, chewing his tobacco quid, uttering no word to enlighten them.

Two or three times again Alma saw the lad, but nevermore anywhere near the farm. The last of their meetings was by accident—like all the others except the first. The spring that brought him was merging into summer. Alma had wandered much farther than she was wont to go looking for earliest huckleberries. All at once he was there, as if the woods had conjured him. The cap came off a little more shyly, somehow a little more sadly, than at the earlier encounters. It remained in the hand which did not hold the book he always carried.

THERE was some unfathomable new constraint about him at first. By degrees it faded out. Then the hours went by like minutes. Faster even than that time a fortnight earlier when, as she looked for the last of the strawberries, searching on and on until she was nearly three miles from home in the direction of the shacks deserted by the

Kanuth Lumber Company, he had suddenly arisen before her from his favorite nook under the gnarled wild crab-apple by the bluff—so suddenly that she would have been frightened but for his smile.

Always he came part way home with her. At that last meeting it was nearly all the way—as far as where the wilderness ended at the first of Homer's fields, and even beyond. And he talked wondrously, luminously, she thought, of many things; but too, too little of himself. She had never yet found courage to ask him his name and he had never proffered it. But he told her how these weeks in the mountains had been for him a culmination, after the years of the stodgy little city across the Smokies. He had always promised his mother—

Here he stopped as one stricken dumb, a painful flush deepening up to his sandy hair, now burnt on the surface to straw color. They were in sight of the house. They could make out Homer seated before it, his chair tilted back against the logs. He had been absorbed in the splicing of a broken bridle with a bit of rope. Alma could not believe Homer had even seen them. But there must be something behind it all, she reasoned at the time, with a heart that pounded until she could hear it—some reason why the stranger, who was now a friend, turned straightway as he did, and said good-by with that abrupt aloofness.

Homer neither paused nor looked up, as she came on alone and passed, confused, bewildered, stricken, into the open entry.

That night as they arose from supper, Homer said to her:

"Don't have nothin' more to do with that feller that come here a-buyin' bacon, Alma. He ain't a-livin' alone in them loggin' shacks. There's a woman thar."

He who rarely spoke at all had commanded it with a vindictiveness she had never heard before from his lips.

But even that was less hard than that day of rain and wind and hail when Jason, driven to shelter by the storm Homer scorned and defied, announced as he dried himself before the chimney fire:

"That young feller and that woman's gone from the camp under the old Kanuth trestle. They left days back."

She understood a little better. She asked no questions. 'Lindy's warning look forestalled that; and besides, what was there she could ask?

Within her a glow of nascent light went dark, and she might only bow her head. . . .

IT ALL rang beneath Alma's mind today like the faint, constant chiming from the far-off cattle ranges. She could not free herself of it. And after a while it revolved and whirred and rumbled, like a millwheel when the flooded race is loosed upon it.

Standing in the upper fields, she peered mechanically for some sign of Homer's return on the raw gashes wounding Atoah peak.

Directly facing her across the creek, Rooster's Comb cut the sky line with notched shaven top that later would be crimson with azaleas. She turned from Atoah. Her hands went out. So near was Rooster's Comb—so friendly. From this height on the farm, even from the open entry of the house, you could see the flowers marching across it. You could watch them from earliest wraiths of service blossoms to final waxy cones of rhododendrons. It was almost as if you could pick them, sitting on the door-stoop.

A homesickness for the other brother surged over her. It was so much less lonesome when Horace was home.

Whenever Horace came home he stayed close about the house, never going farther than the lower fields to shoot at buzzards, or to fetch the letters from the post boxes. And he blew lively tunes on his French harp and never once thought of lifting his hands to help Homer and Jason on the farm, claiming—very justly, Alma thought—that his work as fireman down on the railroad was toil enough for any man.

He was chatty, too. You could talk with Horace. He would walk out with you and help you gather flowers on the wood trails, always taking his French harp along and every now and then lifting it to his lips to blow one of the tunes that sounded so sweet if all so exactly alike. He was the brother nearest herself in age. All the other brothers were married except—but no, Homer had once been married, too! One nearly forgot. It had been something past and done with before Alma was old enough to remember.

But she must not let herself forget how good 'Lindy was even if she could never take mother's place. It had been 'Lindy who had proposed her going away to the Normal Academy at Tuohy, after mother died; 'Lindy who had faced all that lonesomeness for a little sister's sake. And she must not let herself forget how life was the fuller because she had learned to love poetry books. She could have spoken better grammar, too, if she hadn't feared that folks might laugh at her for "a-puttin' on."

Her father had been killed before she was three; shot assisting the revenue men in the raiding of a still. There were brothers and sisters with families and farms of their own hardly a dozen miles away. But years sometimes elapsed between the times that she or 'Lindy saw them.

A century seemed to cut off Homer and Jason, even sometimes 'Lindy herself. It was different with Horace. Nothing but youth could ever find lodgment in his heart. Yet Alma could only keep remembering that her first twenty birthdays were two endless years behind her. Spring had grown recurrent and old, like a beldame tired of her violets.

If only Horace would come! He had promised at Christmas time to be back for a few days in April.

From her heart the hours seemed to have withered: hours when with ears held close to the ground she had listened at bluette time for pulses of the quickening soil. Days were following days and she neither felt nor heard anything of the singing sounds. Only the turgid reckonings, snarling as the eddies of the creek after the rains of March.

There quivered to her recollection, and almost to her lips, one of the running chanties, learned by rote, under wild crab-apple boughs, blossoming brick-pink while spring still flowered rose hue, filming over gauntness:

What hour, what day
Have you said to me, "Go pray!"
Clarion God? . . .
You teach me to yearn
While your blossoms turn
With your vagrant winds astray.
And lo, on the eve of May
'Tis a dream unwon,
A song unsung—

She could not recall the rest. Memory faltered like breath going out. Her shadow lengthened to a purple ribbon cascading down the ruts and furrows. The birds were strangely still.

In that culvert of crab-apple boughs and thorn blossoms under the Kanuth logging trestle she had listened to other runes. Runes of the goat-foot god who blew his syrinx in the vanguard of his minions, treading the scented crags of Hymettus, while honeyed flowers freshened at the touch of his hair. And in listening she had understood. Horace was of the goat-foot train.

Why did he stay so long away from home?

"I never did so feel the need of havin' Horace to talk to," she said to herself.

FROM the deep tangles of Rooster's Comb across the creek there sounded faintly that monotone sweetness that might have been the syrinx of the woodlands as she imagined it: Horace's French harp, as if by evocation.

The mysticism of such coincidences would never again surprise her. The mountains were too full of them. . . .

But there could be no mistaking. He was approaching home by one of his characteristic short cuts, sheer over Rooster's Comb. Yet his tune stayed faint, seemed to come no nearer. He had stopped in some shady depth to refresh himself with music.

She cupped her hands before her lips and called his name: "Hor-ay-ay-aaa—" with the long upward rise of the final syllable and the omission of the sibilant. There was a long stillness. But she was used to that too. When she and 'Lindy called *soo-ooh-kee* to the home-ranging stock at dusk they often waited what seemed hours ere the lowing sounds came in reply.

At last the answer wavered back; far away but lusty, like a muted Indian war-whoop. It *was* Horace! He was coming home! She felt her heart thump as if it would burst seam and gusset.

Her men-folks didn't like their women to "paw" over them. But as she ran down hill, the still air turning to wind with her cleavage, she wondered if she could restrain herself this time. Surely she would have to throw her arms about Horace's neck. She had needed him so! . . .

She met him mid-stream on the precarious footlog, a writhing fork of tree, hacked down by Homer to lie where it had fallen, its supporting limbs jolted by the current.

"Careful, Horace," she warned, balancing herself, clutching at twigs. "It's mighty shaky. Some day it'll wash on down Snowbird."

He was still many feet away. "What's become o' Homer's shingle bridge?" he asked her

"The ropes give way when the creek swole up this year. It went down Snowbird like this tree's a-goin' to do."

He reached her and held out his hands to steady her shoulders.

"Let's not go to the house yet, Horace. Nobody's home but 'Lindy. Sit down here on the bank and visit with me. Play me a little tune."

They chose seats on the naked laurel roots dried by the day's warmth. There had been presage of midsummer in this April air. Shrill daubs of little leaves here and there on Roosters Comb had beaten back rays which seemed sluggish, surcharged with motes, almost dusty. Over their heads specks of telltale rose had been coaxed from the tight, secretive laurel buds. Soon Snowbird would roar and foam along as if through coral, dazzlingly outbranching.

Horace said to her: "I knowed about Homer's a-bein' away."

"How did you know, Horace?"

"I done run into him 'long about dinner-time. He was on his way to the railroad at Anatohy Gap, over acrost from Stoversville. He won't be back no more tonight."

He had flung himself face downward on the moss tufting the laurel roots. She felt that he had other things to tell her. They talked commonplaces. But at last he said to her:

"Alma, did ye ever hear any of the suspicionin' about that woman that stayed with that 'ere young feller over in the old Kanuth lumber shacks last spring?"

Could she answer that? She found strength to say against the roaring in her ears: "Maybe I did. Homer—I reckon I did."

"The suspicionin' was right, Alma. That woman was the one Homer married—twenty-odd years ago. The young feller was her son. She was sickly—that was why she stayed so close—jist like she was a-hidin'. Nobody round thisaway never got a good look at her except Homer. She sent for him soon after they got there. But Homer never said nothin' about it to nobody."

"I know—I know." The girl's lips conveyed what she said but they were nearly soundless. "Homer never speaks—but folks finds out things."

"Homer left her, ye know. She made the mistake of waitin' till after they was married to tell him she'd been married already for a little while. He courted her kind a' fly-by-day and marry-in-haste like, when she was up summerin' in Stoversville, a-restin' up from some mill job over in Tennessee, nigh Chatenoogy. They say she was as pretty as any picter them days."

"He oughtn't to 'a' left her, Horace. It was mighty stern and hard of him. He *is* hard."

HORACE was reflective, his chin up-propped by his elbow as he lay relaxing. "Sometimes I study about it till my head aches. O' course we've done been brought up old-fashioned Methodist, and they don't hold much with divorces: married is married, 'until death do you part.' Still, there must 'a' been something more. If only she'd told Homer first, before old Preacher Tobson spoke the words! Or maybe she got proud too when she did tell him—maybe flew up at his a-rarin' so and made it a quarrel for two. There's some as says she left *him* in the night and he come home from a cattle-roundin' and found her gone in the morning. Nobody'll ever know. They was a-housekeepin' for themselves at the time, a mile outside o' Stoversville. The very house they lived in's been burned down since nineteen year ago. There's some as 'low Homer burned it himself when he quit and come back here to the farm. Nobody'll ever know it all. Homer don't talk."

"Oh, he's hard, he's hard," repeated the girl in a monotone. "I don't mean he ain't good—honest as an oak tree and just as a T-square—or he believes he is. But he makes standards for himself other people cain't live up to. Sometimes it seems as if it was the out-and-out good people with the fear o' God rulin' everything they do, that's the hardest. He never burned that house they lived in. That's just a Stoversville tale. He'd 'a' thought it a sin."

"He wouldn't," Horace disagreed. "He'd 'a' thought the place contam-i-*nate*—where he lived two months out o' wedlock with a woman married to another man already. It was just like Homer to 'a' burned it. It was his own, ye know."

"I've always thought it was less her keepin' it back from Homer about bein' divorced than it was her keepin' back havin' a son."

"Alma, there's a lot o' folks don't believe she had nary son at the time; there's a lot o' folks believes that boy is Homer's son."

"Oh—!" She was stricken, but Horace must not see. She said with white-faced calm: "D'ye reckon it *might* be, Horace?"

"I've somehow 'lowed it," nodded Horace. "He was so set agin' your—why, what's the matter, Alma?"

"Nothin', Horace. . . . 'Lindy must be a-studyin' what's keepin' us."

She arose, leading the way toward the house. She conquered the uncertainty in her steps as she dragged herself along. She must not fall prone, with Horace looking on. She must not even stagger.

It had been a haunting fear during the winter, after the rumors had reached her. Now it was reality. What had seemed a great growing glow within her had hovered on the verge of the incestuous.

As 'Lindy stepped to the entry to meet them there was a clap of thunder from a sudden spot of blackness in the sky. A few hard drops of rain fell viciously.

Inside the largest room the three drew their chairs close to the hearth where 'Lindy had built a fire to heat her flatirons.

But the wane of afternoon cleared as quickly as it had darkened. The brief panic about the top of Atoah made way before an ivory greenishness.

It was lamplighting time before they realized.

ANATOHY GAP. Where the daily westbound train stops to take on water and throw off the mail sacks before beginning its slow crawl up Anatohy grade. . . .

Anatohy Gap had once been only a water stop. Now there was a yellow-painted station partitioned into rooms, in one of which the telegraph operator's wife kept the house for her husband and their brood of children. A general merchandise store, housing the post-office, had sprung into being like a glazed yellow mushroom under the leakage of the water tank. On the denuded slope a hundred yards above the track was the six-room frame structure known as Mrs. Blivven's Hotel, its new planks still unpainted. There were two hacks daily, to carry mail-pouches and passengers from the eastbound and westbound over the eleven miles to the county seat. The one which met the westbound train, toward nightfall, did not leave for Stoversville until the following day.

Homer's wagon had lurched and ground over Atoah mountain, just beyond his own Snowbird farm, and come into Stoversville with the poising of the sun on the peaks after the rain. He had reached the county seat ahead of the hack which brought the mail of the previous evening. Never had the trip looked more like a fool's errand. With the rain a-pouring it hadn't mattered so much. Only a Cherokee Indian will plow his uplands when they are wet. But Jason had predicted clear weather, sure to arrive sometime after daylight; had even laid plans to start on the delayed rounding of some stray hogs. And the upper fields, tilted straight to the sun, would be dry enough for plowing a little while after dinner time, Jason had warned. He had been right.

Yet Homer had set forth against his better judgment, doggedly calling himself a plumb fool, facing his sense of another futility. He was as certain as a man can be that the summons he looked out for, toiling time and again over the coils of Atoh, trying to take time by the forelock, would no more arrive this morning than all the wasted mornings before.

Throughout the convoluted weary drag up Atoah and down it, the rains had kept abating. His jogging shadow had flashed out ever and again to grow cleaner cut as it shortened. He had cursed the mules, constantly trying to turn back as they responded with psychic sensitiveness to his own indecision. "Them upper fields—they'll steam off so quick I could start in hours afore dark. . . . Gee up, damn ye! Where do ye aim ye're a-headin' for!"

But this had after all been the day appointed. The mail hack, struggling into Stoversville a little before noon, caked and bespattered with mud, had brought the letter. As it turned out, too, it was fortunate he had not waited to let this long expected letter reach him at home over the rural delivery route a day and a half later. With the Anatohy road in the state revealed by the mail hack there would be rarely time to reach Anatohy Gap in time for the train.

Twice in the bottom lands, out from

Stoversville, his heavy wheels had been mired to their hubs. When the road became steep and dry on Anatohy Ridge, he paused never an instant to rest his mules. Ordinarily in such ascents he stopped every hundred yards to give them their wind. For long minutes at a time he had stopped like that all the way up Atoah, this morning. The mules had come into Stoversville perky as unbroken colts. Now they were lathery and panting.

THE telegraph operator at Anatohy Gap told him there had been a washout yon side of Peak City. It might be nine o'clock before the westbound train arrived. Then ag'in it mightn't be so long. It was hard tellin'.

So he sat on his wagon seat, while slow-footed night stalked down the wooded cañon through which flowed the Anatohy River.

He had not unhitched his mule team. He had loosened their halters, tied his reins about the brake handle, and fed them where they stood in the open road beside the station. Nor had he been spendthrift enough to join the hack drivers and some of the road-working crew at Mrs. Blivven's supper table. Of late she had taken to charging a straight seventy-five cents per person, with bed thrown in if desired, and no reductions except to the mail men, the road workers, and regular boarders like that. For the third of that sum Homer could buy crackers and canned goods in the store, if he happened to get hungry. That didn't look likely—the way he felt!

It was nearly dark now. Oil lamps with tin reflectors had been lighted in the store and in that part of the station which held the telegraph apparatus. He could hear the little brass hammer starting and stopping: clicketty-icketty—clicketty-etty-etty-icketty . . . The thing seemed always trying to tell something at which it stuck and stuttered.

Its master lounged outside on the track, swapping chaws and jokes with a comfortably fed hack driver and two or three other supper guests of Mrs. Blivven, who served her meal exactly at sundown.

Once, with a start, like one jolted from a trance, Homer heard a voice call out to him:

"The washout's mended all right. But she won't be here for another hour."

It was the telegraph operator. He caught the tickings offhandedly like this as he chatted and chewed tobacco across the track.

"All right," Homer grunted back.

"It'll be a whole hour more!"

"All right."

"Better light down and take a chaw with us."

"I'll set on here awhile."

A clear moon, not yet full, lunged into a pool of sky from under a circlet of granular clouds which heaved like the ring of an ant hill. Stars jerked winking into other pools, also ringed and deep. Now and then, in some instant of restiveness, the mules strained at their gear and the wagon tongue bobbed and jolted. When that happened Homer growled curses at them in an all but inaudible guttural and relapsed into his coma.

Within him his past life weltered in fragments misty and granular as the clouds that ringed the floating moon and the buoy-bobbing clusters of stars. Things near were a-jostle with things a quarter-century remote. There was no connection or sequence.

Funny—his running into Horace and his French harp on the road today, just as his wagon got mired that second time. Horace—a-trampin' it back over to Snowbird to loaf there a day or two. If Horace hadn't 'a' helped him, pushing and lifting at the back of the wagon as he himself pulled straining and tugging at the mules. . . But things always seemed to work out somehow.

AND this letter in his shirt pocket. Kind o' strange at that! She had said she'd write it a year ago, that time she sent for him and he thought it over a week or two and then went and they talked everything over, there in the old Kanuth camp. She had promised to write it about this time of the year; promised, or threatened, she was a-comin' back—comin' back to the mountains in a year or less—to stay! . . . He had half forgotten, only half believed—until the first of the singin' birds come back when it had begun to be on his mind ag'in. Since then it had weighed him down, somehow, until he could think of little besides.

He had made the one more trip over into Stoversville today, resolved that as God should judge him he would think of it no more. And now—yes, things seemed to work out. What was th't 'ere poetry piece about how God moves in a mysterious way? He'd heard Alma a-readin' it out loud to 'Lindy.

The minutes crept. On yon side of Anatohy River chained triangles of hills flattened with their blackness and pushed closer. The mules stood in clear moonlight. But the shadow of the station fell aslant across himself and his wagon.

And her a-dyin', too . . .

She wasn't old. Only a year or two older than himself, he 'lowed. He had never seen anybody as young as that die slowly and consciously like old folks did. Toward the last, Mother had talked of nothin' but things far back before any of her children was born. Would it be the same with this woman? But he 'lowed it couldn't be as bad as she said in her letter. Who knowed but the mountains might make her strong and chirpy ag'in? No doubt she exaggerated. Women always did. . . .

Well, he had held out ag'in' her twenty-odd year, never makin' any stand to get her back after her confession and his denunciation—and her a-leavin' him in the night like that when he had gone out into the mountains to wrestle with his soul. He had returned to the home he'd tried to make, with a soul he believed was softened. He had found only a letter telling him yet more. In his chimney fire she had strewed the live coals with ashes.

Then, a little less than a year ago, she had talked to him and told him how the first man was long ago dead and gone. He had admitted that he felt it his duty to take her back then; but this time it had been she who held firm. Not yet, she had said. In a year she would come again to the mountains she loved. Always they had seemed to put new life into her. She would write him beforehand and they would talk it over again. Meanwhile she had her boy to consider. A post for summer teaching had been offered him. Where he went, she must go. Next year . . . But a second time Homer had arisen abruptly and left her, hardened the more for his moment of weakness.

Her son! Homer smiled grimly at that even now. Did she think *that* was an argument to remove the shale that had spread through his years like a landslide, gatherin', gatherin', settlin' solid?

But a dying woman . . . If that failed to alter his feelin's or his convictions, yet it put another aspect on his duty. He would nuss her even if the farm had to be neglected—nuss her and wait on her—him and Lindy. . . .

FAR away came the wail of the engine throttle. He thought of banshees and the creepy legends Alma had learned at school and would tell to 'Lindy and Horace when the night wind whistled about the Snowbird hearth. The train would be mounting to the higher level beside the river, five miles below. Even the rumble was plainly audible. A moment more and the sound was cut off by some out-jutting ledge of hill. But every little while it could be heard again.

Each time a little plainer. . . .

The telegraph operator was tugging at his sleeve.

"I skidded across the track in a hurry," the man was saying. "It was a message for you. I'll tell the world a feller's got to keep one ear open 'round train time. Some guy wires he's on this train with his mother and asks us please to see that his telegram goes straight to Homer Hunterville, R.F.D., Snowbird, in the Stoversville mail."

Homer's lip tightened. "I had a letter already."

"Well, no offense, I hope. They'll be here in less'n ten minutes now." The man sidled away toward the lighted room from which came that eternal clicketty-etty-etty-click-click-click.

To Homer it had all at once gone hateful, like a swarm of gnats about the head.

So even in dying she must play this trick upon him—must bring with her the boy—her son. What else had called her from his hearth in the night while he wrestled in the mountains and his soul was softening—what else but yearning for her baby? She had let the boy rob her of him in life—and now in death . . .

The telegraph operator was directing some of the loungers across the track. Homer could catch part of what he was saying.

"Yes, Abe Hawshaw's been preparin' me on the wire from Peak City. . . . Them things is heavy. . . . Be ready, boys.

Reckon we'd better all heave to. . . . metallic. . . ."

It was none of Homer's concern. Just another who was through—sent out over the Tobin branch line—back home, he 'lowed—no matter how far they went they always liked to be laid back home. He mistook the shudder that wrenched through him for the night chill. His teeth were chattering. He would need all the fresh rheumatism-oil he had bought that noon.

He climbed from his wagon, bent and twitching with premonitions of the pain.

"You won't mind lendin' us a hand maybe —if we need an extra man?" The telegraph operator spoke about them things being heavy sometimes; metallic, Abe Hawshaw had said.

The ache was growling in Homer's muscles—he could feel them tying, tightening into knotlike focuses of ache—but he was the first man at the door of the baggage car, the first to put his shoulder to the oblong box they shoved over the sill. He took the major portion of the weight, as earlier in the day he had set himself to lifting his wagon from the mire.

A train conductor supervised the task. The burden was got safely across the ledge of the station platform.

Homer said to the conductor:

"I'm expectin' friends that ought to 'a' lighted down from the passenger car. Maybe they don't know it's Anatohy. Maybe they ought to be reminded."

He became conscious of one who stood a little apart, shrouded by one of the black shadows that cut the unsteady streamers of light.

"We *are* here, Homer Hunterfield."

Every one else was moving away, many of them remounting the steps of the train. It lurched forward and began to crawl—furtively

"I cain't see ye," said Homer. "Them headlights makes a feller blind as a bat. But I reco'nize your voice."

"I've brought her," said the other. "She died on the evening of the day she wrote you she was coming. But I had promised to bring her—she wanted to be buried with her husband's people—she wanted to sleep where once she had known a few weeks of rest and happiness—she wanted you to know. . ."

The speaker's voice broke. He seemed after all hardly more than a boy. And with the arrested sob that halted him there rolled a landslide of shale from Homer Hunterfield's heart.

"There, there! You was a good son to her," he comforted. "My team's been on the road nigh all day, but we'll start takin' her acrost at sun-up. Don't cry, boy—dont cry. You've been a good son to her. You've not got nothin' to reproach yourself with."

Already the train had crept away. Homer heard its stertorous pantings and puffings far away up the grade.

ALMA HUNTERFIELD was reading the letter Horace had brought from the post boxes two miles away where the Snowbird road met the rural delivery at the base of Atoah.

The letter was directed in sprawling pencil script; like nearly all the mail that came from near home. It had been sent out from Stoversville that morning. But the writing on the envelope was so much more than ordinarily cramped and labored that neither she nor Horace had recognized it. Moments before opening had been spent in conjecture.

She read it slowly, her lips mumbling the syllables but making no sound. Yet more slowly she read it again:

dear Alma

it aint easy to rite cause my rumatism troubles some

im buryin my wife side of mother's and pappy's grave in the old methdist graveyard im bringing my stepson home hes two year older than you i want him to go on back to school in the fall and finish gettin ready to be a teacher i reckon i can afford the money and maybe for you to go along too and finish yores lindys got to get on without you someday and i reckon she s got to get started gettin' used to it if you go on tryin for yore teacher certificate the buryin will be at three aclock this evenin with Preacher Morgan preachin the service

yours truly
Yore Brother
HOMER HUNTERFIELD.

Alma handed Horace the letter without looking up. "It's from Homer. Maybe you'd better take it to the kitchen and read it out to 'Lindy."

"Where are ye bound for, Alma?"

"Oh—just down to the creek. Some of them laurel buds are so pink and swole I do believe they'll open in water in the house. Come down and help me gather 'em when you've read 'Lindy the letter, Horace. Bring your harp along and play me a tune."

A Novel Complete in This Issue

The Recluse of Fifth Avenue

A Man's Career May Be His Stronghold, But if It Is Built of Ruthless Ambition and Chicanery There Are Many Loop-Holes For the Enemy

By Wyndham Martyn

Illustrations by S. George Phillips

IT WAS characteristic of Peter Milman that he should bear the shock of the second of his life's tragedies with no visible symptom of emotion.

The first of these blows had been dealt him twenty-five years before. He had suffered it in this same richly furnished room of his house in lower Fifth Avenue. Sneed, the butler, who had just handed him the morning papers, had brought him—a quarter of a century ago—the letter in which his wife told him she had gone away and would not return.

The second blow swept away his comfortable fortune. At fifty, without near relatives and long estranged from old friends, Peter Milman would be compelled to move from the house in which he had been born, and in which he hoped to die, to mix with the world he had forgotten.

The three morning papers Sneed placed before him, although they varied somewhat in their telling of Hazen Brewer's failure, had substantially the same account of it. Milman read the headlines many times. "Hazen Brewer Bankrupt." "News Comes As Startling Climax to Wall Street Career." "Huge Fortune Wiped Out." "Corner in International Motors Beginning of End is Belief."

Brewer's liabilities were fifteen million dollars. His assets were given as less than five thousand dollars. Somewhere, sandwiched among these vast debts, was Peter Milman's modest million. For years now Hazen had attended to his affairs. Hazen had spoken enthusiastically of International Motors and promised his friend huge returns.

The butler, sensing ill news from the hastily read captions, grew relieved when he saw his employer take out his pocket scissors and begin to clip such extracts from the papers as interested him. Later these clippings would be arranged systematically with the thousands of others which during long years Milman had gathered. In the library steel-lined drawers, carefully locked, held the harvest of these gleanings.

As Sneed carried away the breakfast dishes he felt his isolation keenly. He wished he were not the only servant in this gloomy house tucked away among office buildings. He longed to discuss his master's business with some other sympathetic soul who had the Milman interests at heart.

At three o'clock Peter Milman came down the stairs and selected a cane. He was one of those slight, small-boned men so often seen in the dwindling families of races near extinction. His smartly cut coat, his immaculate silk hat and distinguished cane made his figure seem from a rear view to be boyish. It was when one saw the pale, lined face, the tired eyes and the thin, supercilious mouth, that one realized this was a man to whom the world had long since seemed empty vanity.

As he stepped through the door he realized that he had not left his home since his Aunt Georgina's funeral three years before. The square stone house, erected by his grandfather in former days, had once been a northern outpost of the city.

Today he was even less conscious of his surroundings than usual. He was on his way to see his lawyer and find out how he stood financially. He felt almost certain that he had fallen with Hazen Brewer. Not for twenty years had Peter Milman been so much disturbed. Ruin meant giving up his home. The idea was intolerable.

He entered the private office of Herman Loddon as one assured of his position and certain of his welcome. Assuredly Loddon, who owed so much to the Milmans, would be able to supply him with the information he desired.

THE first direct intimation of the difference between a millionaire and a poor man was given him as he entered Loddon's room. Loddon remained seated. Hitherto he had risen clumsily to his feet at sight of his distinguished client and with awkward gestures motioned him to the seat of honor. And his face had been wreathed with smiles. For the first time Peter Milman saw the man Herman Loddon as he really was. Milman's first impression was that the lawyer resembled a pyramid: the narrow forehead broadening at the eyes and the heavily jowled cheeks sunk in narrow shoulders which in turn became one with a vast stomach.

Peter Milman's second impression was that Herman Loddon hated him and had always hated him. There could be no other explanation of his lack of courtesy and the sneering smile with which he greeted his client. For a quarter of a century he had worn a disarming smile. Hazen Brewer's failure had swept away the necessity for using it any more. Things, then, were desperate.

Milman's manner was still as loftily courteous as ever.

"I hope you have been able to find out the extent of Mr. Brewer's misfortunes," he said.

"Misfortunes!" Loddon cried. "His crimes, you mean."

"I am not asking you to prejudge my friend," Peter Milman said quietly. "I want to know if the morning papers are correct in stating that his entire fortune has disappeared."

"They are," Loddon answered with an appearance of satisfaction; "and as you wouldn't take my advice about your investments, your money has gone too. I tell you, Milman, you've only got what I prophesied a million times."

Milman! Never before had Herman Loddon presumed so much. Loddon's father had been the Milman coachman at their country place at Hastings years before. When he had been killed in a runaway accident, Peter Milman, the elder, had taken charge of the son's education and eventually had set him up in practice and given him his first case.

"Then nothing is left?" Milman asked.

"Not a cent. You're luckier than Brewer because you've got a valuable lot on Fifth Avenue and there are fifty men waiting to make you an offer for it and put a big building where that mausoleum of yours stands."

Milman said nothing. He allowed Loddon's sneer at his home to pass. Loddon did not know that when Hazen Brewer and his International Motors incurred the enmity of great financial interests, and was so hard pressed for money, he had come to Milman and begged in utter desperation for a loan. It was Hazen Brewer who had arranged the mortgage on the Milman home. It was Brewer alone who had profited by the affair. And this mortgage was shortly to fall due and there was no money to pay it.

"You can't stay there, if that's what you are trying to figure out," Loddon said brutally. "The taxes are heavy and you have some outstanding debts: my account for instance. Sell it and live in Italy is my advice." He yawned rudely.

Peter Milman's question turned his red face a deeper hue:

"Have you always hated me, Loddon?"

The lawyer did not answer immediately. This hate of his was a complex thing, the result of a thousand envies. He had always resented Milman's discriminations when social functions were still a part of his life. It is true that he had dined many times in the Milman house, but his wife had never been asked there. He came to understand in the end that he was asked because Peter Milman found it less tedious than going to Loddon's office. Loddon envied Milman his suave and debonair manner, his education, the clubs to which he belonged, the fact that a downtown street was named for his family and among the many branches of the Milman family tree some members of most of the great New York families had nestled. He hated Milman because, despite his unwise boasting, he knew he had never convinced Milman of his importance.

"Always," he said slowly, with a rush of relief at being at last able to voice his emotions. "Yes, I hated you when my father drove you to school and I couldn't go either inside with you or on the box with him. I've hated you for your friends and the way you've expected me to come when you felt like calling." Loddon laughed sneeringly. "But that's all done with. I'm on top and I have only pity for you now."

"I think I prefer the former emotion," Milman murmured.

Herman Loddon watched him depart with the feeling that his triumph had not been as assured as he could have wished. Perhaps, after all, there was something about men like Milman that made them different from him. Then the thought of his two millions reassured him and he lumbered to the window and watched his former client cross the road.

PETER MILMAN reached his home without encountering any one who knew him. Sneed, who concerned himself greatly with the sudden change in his employer's habits, saw him return with obvious relief. He had read the papers and realized the extent of Hazen Brewer's troubles. He wished he dared ask Mr. Milman if he, too, were badly hit. Peter Milman's face told him nothing. Nor was his customary manner changed.

"I am going over the upper rooms after luncheon," said Milman. "Please see that they are in order."

It was in these spacious chambers that the old furniture about which experts raved was stored. Not for almost two years had he ascended the stairway to the upper floor. These six rooms were arranged as a museum. Milman moved from piece to piece. Everything had its definite association. He stopped before an eighteenth-century card table covered with sealskin. On this table in 1745 a Peter Milman had lost a thousand pounds on a cut of the cards with a blueblood of South Carolina. Those six banister-backed chairs, by Hepplewhite, had been made to order for a Milman.

There was one room devoted to the Dutch furniture that had come to the Milmans from a marriage with a Van Sluyter heiress. Peter Milman bent down to look at a Dutch church stool which a Van Sluyter servant had carried to a place of worship two hundred years before. It was black in color and on one side bore a picture of the Last Judgment and some appropriate verses.

"I don't read Dutch," Milman observed, "but I remember the translation. Listen, Sneed, it may do you good."

"Certainly, sir," said Sneed respectfully.

> "The Judgment of God is now prepared; there is
> still time, leave unwisdom.
> The pious will be separated from the wicked.
> God's wisdom encircles the Universe."

"Very true, Mr. Peter, sir," said Sneed. There was a look on his employer's face that he did not understand, something hard and ruthless.

Sneed had rarely known him to comment on any of the exhibits before. Today he had a word for everything.

"On this settle with folding candlestick," he observed, "Benjamin Milman fell asleep in the Revolutionary War and was captured by a redcoat major who gave him liberty owing to his pretty skill on a six-string bass viol. The viol is in the next room. These three mahogany pieces," he said, pausing before a six-legged high case of drawers, "once belonged to the man whom Aaron Burr speaks of as 'my friend Hamilton whom I killed.' "

"Everything has a history," said Sneed profoundly.

"It was my intention to bequeath them to the Metropolitan." Milman frowned a little. "It will seem like breaking faith with the dead."

Sneed did not yet know that the man he

served was insolvent and that all these relics which told so much of the Milman history must come under the hammer.

"You can leave me," Milman said, after a pause. "I want to remain here some time."

At six o'clock, when Sneed ventured to summon Peter Milman, he was vaguely disturbed by his employer's manner. There was a smile where usually mild cynicism reigned. Almost it seemed as if the sword which Milman held had imbued him with the swashbuckling courage of that hard-drinking, roistering Oliver Milman who had been a notable figure in the Colonial Wars.

"I am not sure," Peter Milman observed, "that man made a good exchange when he put aside the sword and depended upon law and its chicaneries."

"So I've heard, Mr. Peter, sir," Sneed returned, understanding nothing.

"I was not aware the view was so generally accepted," said his employer. "The man who owned this literally carved his way to fortune. He had fought in Europe before he came here. His God-fearing brother, my own ancestor, disowned him publicly in church on Christmas Sunday and lost all his cattle and barns by lightning the next summer. I have always had a sneaking fondness for Captain Oliver."

During the remainder of the evening Sneed thought with some bewilderment of his master's attitude. It was not for him to know that Captain Oliver's shade had whispered courage into the ear of the last of the Milmans.

AT TEN o'clock on the following morning Peter Milman entered the offices of a firm of lawyers that had transacted the private business of Hazen Brewer. Henry Payne, the head of the firm, looked troubled when Milman's card was brought in.

"I came," Milman began in his urbane manner, "to find out, if possible, the extent of Mr. Brewer's losses. One cannot invariably believe the press in these matters."

"I hope Mr. Brewer is not worrying now."

"Then things are not as bad as they seemed?" Milman's heart pounded as he said it.

"Worse! I've bad news for you, Mr. Milman. Poor Hazen Brewer committed suicide in the early hours, this morning. I suppose when he saw there was left nothing but liabilities his mind gave way."

Milman had too much control of himself to allow Payne to see how stricken he was.

"Poor Hazen!" he murmured. "He was one of my oldest and best friends."

A curious tribute, thought the lawyer, to one whose speculations had ruined him.

"The mortgage on my house—" Milman began. "I suppose it will be foreclosed?"

"I'm afraid so. There will be a meeting of Brewer's creditors within a day or so. If I can act for you in any way I shall be only too glad to do so."

"You are very kind," said Peter Milman courteously.

"A thoroughbred," murmured the lawyer as he left. "Poor old devil, wiped out absolutely!"

Before going home Peter Milman took his way to an agency which specialized in French domestic help of the better sort.

"I want," he said to the woman at the desk, "a French butler who will do the entire work of a house in which only a few of the rooms are occupied. A woman comes in by the day to clean the place and the windows, and the furnace is attended to."

"I think I can suit you," she said, and turned to a card index.

"Wait, there are other necessary qualifications. He must be a good plain cook and know no English."

"That makes it easier," she said. "I have a man with very good references who could fill the bill. He came over in the last quota. If you will wait a few minutes I'll arrange to have you meet him."

Achille Lutry was forty-seven, rather terrified with the size and noise of New York, and anxious to begin to save money so that he might return to Amiens and establish a restaurant. The wages he was offered seemed marvelous. He accepted them and complimented his new employer on the purity of his accent. The restrictions seemed no burden to him. He had no friends to ask to the house and the little leisure he was allowed made the saving of his wages certain. He was to report at the house on lower Fifth Avenue at noon the next day.

That night at dinner the estimable Sneed noted a certain unusual nervousness in his master's manner although he did not dream of the ill fortune that awaited him.

"Sneed," Peter Milman began, when the

coffee had been poured out, "my future household arrangements will be on a different scale from what they have been of late. You have been a faithful servant to me for years. I am not likely to find your equal. In lieu of notice I shall give you six months' wages. I shall be glad if you will leave before luncheon tomorrow."

"Oh, Mr. Peter, sir," Sneed wailed, "what have I done to be treated like this?"

"Nothing. If I had my way I should never let you go. You cannot understand how sorry I am. But the thing is inevitable. There are matters which you must not ask me to explain, and this is one of them. You cannot be unaware of Mr. Brewer's failure. Perhaps you do not know that he committed suicide this morning, leaving his affairs in such a state that I shall not be long left in possession of this house."

"Let me stay," Sneed begged. "I don't want wages. I can do the work we pay that woman for, and tending the furnace is good exercise. This is my home, too, sir."

He was a picture of abject grief. The news left him old, flaccid, trembling.

"Sneed," said the other kindly, "if I tell you that by remaining here you will embarrass me and imperil certain plans I have determined on, will you still want to stay?"

"I'd do anything for you, Mr. Peter," he said brokenly.

"I knew you would. I will say this: if, by any turn of the wheel things become better, I will have you back. The man who comes tomorrow can never take your place. You may regard him as a temporary expedient. When you go, Sneed, I shall see one of my few friends depart."

The butler knew that there was no argument he could use to change his employer's determination. But he was cheered by the faint hope that some day he might return. Six months was not so long; he thought he would spend the period in foreign travel. He had understood that during the last quarter-century certain improvements had been made in the world.

WHEN Peter Milman told Sneed that his presence would imperil certain plans, he was speaking the sober truth. In the upper rooms of his home there had been born the determination to save the things he loved from disposal by auction. It seemed as though the shades of his forbears, lingering about the things that were once theirs, had concentrated their influence upon their ultimate descendant. He had gone to the Milman museum to say farewell; he had put down his ancestor's sword with the determination to fight. And in this fight Sneed, for all his faithful ways and honest heart, could have no part.

Milman's manner of life changed when Achille Lutry entered his service. To the Frenchman it was not unusual that Milman went out frequently. Lutry knew nothing of his former secluded existence. He was happy and incurious. Cut off by lingual deficiencies from the gossip of those who dealt in ice, milk and bread, he had no idea that the Peter Milman he took orders from was not the same being as that to whom the amiable Sneed gave reverence.

A few days after Sneed's hegira, Achille Lutry dropped into a near-by mail box three letters addressed to: Fleming Bradney, Edgewater, New Jersey; Floyd Malet of Philadelphia; Neeland Barnes of Peekskill-on-the-Hudson.

Fleming Bradney, returning home from a tedious day of work in the laboratory of an oil refinery, found his letter on the table where his meal was set. He was a big, untidy man of middle age, taciturn and unpopular with his fellows since he neither invited confidence nor answered personal questions. At the Edgewater refinery, as at that in Bayonne, from which he had come two years previously, he was known as F. Bradney. No one suspected him of being the great physicist Fleming Bradney, once the foremost man in his line that America had produced.

He slit the envelope and looked at the address and signature. The name Peter Milman meant as little to him as his own name meant to Edgewater. But between the pages was a money order for one hundred dollars. With curiosity he read Peter Milman's letter:

> I beg you not to imagine that by enclosing this money I suppose you to be an object of charity. I urgently desire you to dine with me today week at half-past seven o'clock and it may be that to do so you must engage a substitute or be put to some expense not otherwise necessary.
>
> You may ask yourself why you should go to this trouble for I am unknown to you. I would answer that I am thoroughly acquainted with your life history and entertain a great admiration for your genius. Think of me as one anxious to see you regain the rank of one of the great scientists of the

> **world. Perhaps at this dinner you may be offered the opportunity.**
>
> **Beside yourself there will be, I trust, Neeland Barnes, formerly an international polo-player and owner of race horses, and Floyd Malet who, when he seemed about to take his place in the world as a great sculptor, suffered an unfortunate eclipse.**

After dinner Bradney went to the library and opened the New York directory. Sure enough, Peter Milman was recorded as living on lower Fifth Avenue. The thing, then, was not a foolish practical joke. Milman's name was not in the telephone directory but that meant nothing; the name might have been omitted purposely.

Puffing at a big pipe, Fleming Bradney sat on his little balcony and gazed at Manhattan's lights. This strange letter awakened old hopes and ambitions that he had thought forever dead. Clearly, there could be no practical joke which expended a hundred dollars for its fulfilment. Bradney read the letter again. The phrase, "Perhaps at this dinner you may be offered the opportunity," took his fancy strangely. Opportunity! Did it exist for a man who had been disgraced and was now forgotten? He went into his bedroom and disinterred a suit of evening clothes from its moth-ball tomb. He had not worn it for a dozen years.

PETER MILMAN'S letter reached Neeland Barnes at a moment when that eminent sportsman was engaged in staving off his most persistent creditor, the landlord Lippsky.

Barnes was a tall, finely made man who, because his love of horses and his inability to judge accurately their chances in races, had run through several fortunes. After his wife's death his relatives had shrugged their shoulders and abandoned him. The many schemes for his rehabilitation failed. He disappeared from fashionable resorts. His only daughter was being educated in England by rich relations. He had drifted about the world until, having exhausted all resources, he had taken a little house in the outskirts of Peekskill.

Here he was engaged in what he explained as an attempt "to stage a come-back." He was trying to become physically fit and he was succeeding. But mountain hikes and sculling up the noble stream brought no grist to the mill. Lippsky, who held sport in abhorrence, was daily incensed that his unpaying guest should scorn to get into condition by means justified economically, such as digging ditches, cutting lawns and sawing wood. Lippsky cared nothing that his tenant had once been distinguished in fields of sport.

"Mr. Barnes, you are a loafer," Lippsky cried when the sportsman announced his inability to pay rent long overdue. To Barnes, who had just returned from a twenty-mile walk, this seemed cruelly unjust.

"Some day, if you keep on annoying me," said he, "I shall kill you."

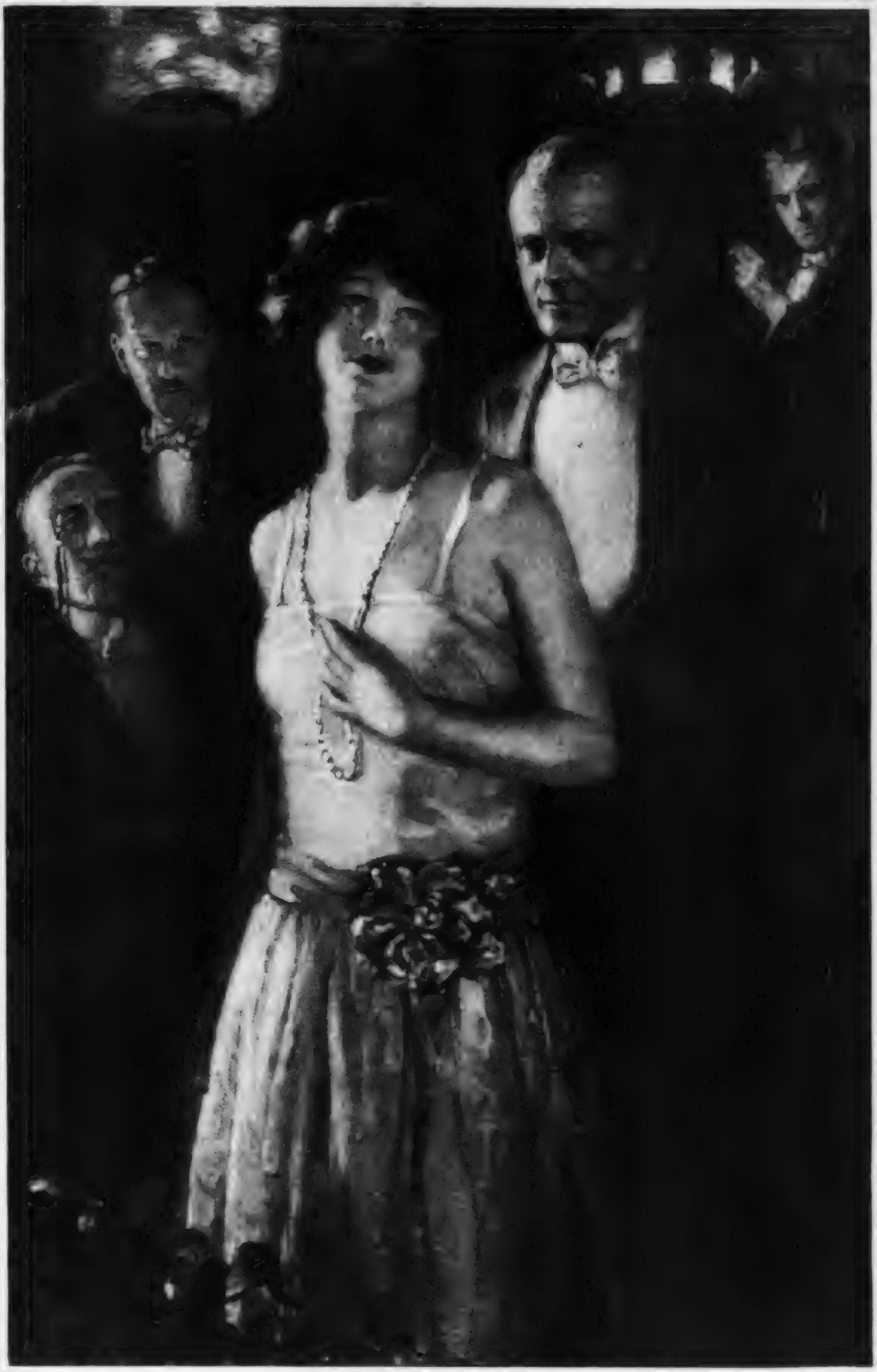
"You don't have to kill me," Lippsky cried shrilly; "you just pay my rent. Sell your swell clothes and get overalls." He waved Peter Milman's letter. "Get some of your swell friends to lend you money."

Neeland Barnes looked at the letter, puzzled. He did not recognize the writing but the stationery was reassuring. Once in New Orleans he had opened a letter to convince another landlord—and a fifty-dollar bill had fluttered out to be captured by that avaricious one.

"When what you term my swell friends know I am living in a hovel like this they will advance me money. I shall not ask them until I have finished my training. I am about to begin. If I hit you it's your look-out."

Barnes shadow-boxed until his landlord had disappeared; then he read the astonishing letter a dozen times and secreted the money order at once. Alone of the three who had received somewhat similar communications he knew of Milman and his family. Very distantly they were connected by marriage. Barnes had no idea that the Brewer failure had brought Peter Milman to penury. One sentence he found strangely enigmatic: "If, as I believe, you feel yourself unfairly treated by the world that was yours, I may be able to offer you the opportunity of taking your place again in society." For Neeland Barnes longed above all things for the comfortable life that had once been his.

He rolled a cigaret now and indulged in pleasing reveries. Good dinners were not given idly nor were hundred-dollar bills expended for nothing. Peter Milman wanted him to do something. Well, Neeland Barnes was his man. Perhaps after all these years the man who had run away with Mrs. Milman was back in America. Perhaps Peter



"You have not behaved as I should expect of a gentlewoman of your family. Why?"
"I've told you," Nita cried.

Milman desired him to be chastised publicly. He would find Neeland Barnes courageous and in better physical trim than he had been for a dozen years.

Naturally there would be expense money. He would be compelled to put up at the best hotels. The newspaper boys would be kind to him. He had always liked them. There would be cuts of him in the best papers. It would be a delightful experience to pay Lippsky his deferred rent in nickels and cents and watch him scrambling feverishly for the coins among poison ivy. And he would be able to send his daughter a decent present at last. Poor Nita, whom he had not seen for years, brought up by zealous relatives far from his care! The adventure might lead to amazing things.

FLOYD MALET was a man of middle age, thin and haggard, with little regard for his present occupation and still less for his personal appearance. Under the name of L. Floyd he, who had hoped to see his name associated with Rodin and Meunier, was earning a poor living by teaching drawing in a Philadelphia private school. The arrival of Milman's letter found him in an irritable mood, since only that afternoon he had been reprimanded for dealing harshly with a particularly idle pupil whose enormous social prestige endeared her in the eyes of the headmaster.

The letter held out the promise of temporary relief from an intolerable life. There was money for the trip and enough over to live for many weeks as he had lately learned to live. He packed his grip, thankful that he had saved a suit of evening clothes.

There is something vivifying about the air of Manhattan; it had its effect on the three men bound for Peter Milman's house. Bradney held up his head again and Malet lost his droop of depression. Neeland Barnes, walking briskly down the Avenue, passed clubs which had dropped him on account of nonpayment of dues and felt himself within measurable distance of reëlection.

As he neared the Milman house he wondered what his fellow guests would be like. In other years no physicists had been numbered among his acquaintances. He was not quite certain what a physicist was. As to sculptors, he had met one in Rome, but he was a marquis. Sculptors were probably all right. He was reassured by remembering that the wife of a former polo pal had her own studio. But he would probably have to dominate the conversation with Peter Milman and talk of old New York society. He must be careful not to mention the Daynes. The runaway wife had been a Dayne.

Wedged in between tall buildings, the Milman house looked squat and unimpressive, yet Barnes gazed at it with respect. Lesser men than Milman would have sold at a profit and moved uptown. What this millionaire might want with Neeland Barnes was a delightful mystery. He rapped loudly with the brass knocker.

Neeland Barnes disapproved of Achille, who admitted him with lavish gestures. This was not the sort of butler a Milman should employ. He followed him to a library where he found his host speaking to Floyd Malet. It was as Barnes thought: sculptors were not quite up to his social standard. This stranger was physically inconspicuous and his clothes should have been more recently pressed.

Barnes held out his hand to Peter Milman, as one could to a man of his distinguished ancestry, with a smile which plainly said, "I, at least, belong here."

"It is very kind of you to come," said Peter Milman. He turned to Floyd Malet. "Mr. Malet, this is Mr. Neeland Barnes."

Barnes nodded a little coldly. Curious, he thought, that Peter Milman should not have introduced Malet to him.

THEN Fleming Bradney came in. Although his clothes were of another era there was an air of power about him. His was a carelessness due less to ignorance than to lack of concern with other people's modes of life and thought. He was as tall as Barnes, broader, but lacked the fine carriage which distinguished the old racing man.

Peter Milman, so Barnes thought, treated him with extreme respect. It was not until Achille brought in the cocktails that Barnes's frown left him. It was easy to see, that of the three, Peter Milman considered him the least important. Why, he wondered, did Milman esteem it an honor to have a physicist to dinner? The word recurred many times. This must be some new way of describing a physician. Well, physicians were not so bad. One had married a Vanderbilt in America and another a Duke of Norfolk's daughter in England. The second cocktail found Barnes more amiable. He looked keenly at his host but discovered no trace of nervousness about him, no wildness of eye which might confirm the world's opinion that he was mentally unfit.

The dining-room was beautifully furnished.

"Ha, ha!" said Barnes. "Good old Chippendale!"

"Sheraton," the sculptor corrected gently.

"Just as you like," Barnes said genially. There were bottles in plain view which banished any ill-humor he might have felt. Not for years had he sat down to a really well-chosen and well-cooked dinner. Everything about him spoke of lavish expenditure. To Floyd Malet everything spoke of exquisite taste. The relief, after years of furnished dissonance, was grateful. He felt cheerful after a decade of gloom.

The bearded Bradney noticed only that he was sitting at a bountiful table and sipping excellent vintage wines. What was the reason? He was impatient to know. What opportunity was he to be offered to regain the rank in science of which disgrace had bereft him?

His host and Neeland Barnes were talking of old New Yorkers. They had common friends in plenty. Why was Neeland Barnes here? Bradney glanced at him and decided he did not like him. Barnes was too prosperous and assured. Like Milman, he was probably a millionaire.

By degrees Bradney found himself listening to Barnes's anecdotes with a less critical attitude. Barnes had humor. A handsome man, Bradney decided, courageous, popular with men and women alike and not burdened with sufficient mental power to enable him to feel he had a mission in life. He lived, no doubt, as his wealthy class does, simply for the moment.

In truth, Neeland Barnes had forgotten Lippsky entirely. The dinner was excellent. A fellow countryman of Achille's had seen to that. The wines were superb. Barnes adopted an air of exquisite but lofty courtesy toward his fellow guests. They said very little but their table manners were reassuring. Barnes determined that, when the dinner was finished, he would lean back in his chair, survey Milman with a smile that has world-knowledge and kindly cynicism in it and demand to know for what reason he was brought from Peekskill retirement. As one old New Yorker to another, Peter Milman would give his reasons.

"That's a very fine oil painting over your head, Mr. Milman," said Floyd Malet, disturbing the train of Barnes's fancies.

"A relative of mine," Milman answered, "Captain Oliver Milman. That was painted in Holland when he was a young soldier in England's wars with France. It is by Jordaens, the brilliant fellow student of Rubens."

"It's like you, Mr. Milman," Fleming Bradney said.

"That's very curious," said Peter Milman. "Nobody has ever said that before."

"Then they have not been close observers," said Malet. "It has your faintly quizzical expression: sophisticated doubt leavened by a touch of humor. He was a soldier, you say?"

"Yes. He joined his brother in Plymouth County, Massachusetts, after that picture was painted. Later he fought in King Philip's War. He was killed fighting for England against France in Pennsylvania. Historians know it as King William's War. His brother disowned him for his godless ways of life. In revenge Captain Oliver bequeathed him his entire fortune, which rescued the stern and righteous brother from beggary. But for Oliver Milman we might have become obscure farmers on Cape Cod. What the Milmans had they owe to him."

NEELAND BARNES launched a bitter invective against righteous relatives. "Take it from one who knows," he said, "it is the black sheep who'll do a man a good turn when he needs it. All the neatly combed white lambs aren't there when the pinch comes."

"Then you think civilization defends the moralities more vigorously than they deserve?" Fleming Bradney asked. "That's an interesting idea. I must admit that my most unpleasant experiences have been with those who admit themselves to be my moral superiors. It may be that we are drilled to obedience so that the larger villainies may go unpunished by mass action."

"I'm not sure I get exactly what you mean," Barnes confessed, "but I've found that my righteous relatives always gave me good advice and the shadier sort slipped me the coin."

"SOME day a great lawlessness will sweep over the world," Malet declared. "I don't mean as a concerted action on the part of any socialist or syndicalist movement but as an expression of human unrest. We have been tied down too long. We have endured too much the oppressions of those in authority."

"We'll stampede, you mean?" said Barnes. "I'll be there."

"What?" Bradney cried. "You'll assist at the downfall of your own especial kind of civilization? Impossible!"

But Neeland Barnes was thinking of Lippsky. "I shall be there," he asserted, "and it will be a picnic for me."

"Do you think," Peter Milman asked, "that there is justification for the human herd stampeding because it is dissatisfied with its masters?"

"Certainly," Floyd Malet said. He was thinking of that disdainful school girl who had complained of him. "Sometimes it is right to take the law in one's own hands."

"The law!" scoffed Bradney, recalling certain earlier passages of his life. "The law! Now I'm a typical law-abiding citizen but I cannot regard any man-made statutes as sacrosanct. What is law? A rule of civic conduct prescribed by the supreme power of the state, commanding what is right and prohibiting what is wrong. That's Blackstone's definition. It brings up naturally a discussion of what is right and what is wrong. In Kansas, for instance, it is wrong to smoke a cigaret. Can any sane person believe that if I smoke a cigaret there I am an immoral person?"

Neeland Barnes looked instinctively over the table to his host. It was his experience that all rich men supported those laws which kept the masses in order. In his own days of wealth he had done the same. But there was no frown on Peter Milman's face.

"This is a discussion which interests me more than you can imagine," said Peter Milman, glancing swiftly at Captain Oliver's portrait. "I usually have coffee and liqueurs served in the garden." He rose. "I think you may prefer it there."

"A garden?" Floyd Malet cried. "A garden in lower Fifth Avenue?"

"You shall see," said Milman, smiling.

They followed their host through library and corridor to what seemed to be a blank wall. A door, cleverly concealed by mouldings, swung open. Not for twenty years had strangers been offered the chance to gaze upon Peter Milman's Japanese Garden.

"This is Japan!" Malet exclaimed. "I have seen this in Nagasaki."

"I modeled it on a part of the gardens in the Teahouse of the Indescribable Butterflies in Nagasaki, with a suggestion, here and there, from the Fukawaga Garden."

Needland Barnes knew nothing about Japanese gardens but the thing took his fancy amazingly. Quaint bridges, little streams with brilliant goldfish, garden lanterns, strangely set stones, made this back yard, which was seventy feet long by half as much wide, the most entrancing garden he had seen on this avenue where he, too, had been born.

At the other end of it was a sort of platform on which comfortable seats were arranged. Immediately below it was a lily pool. Twenty feet above was a framework of steel mesh to which mosquito netting was attached.

While Achille was bringing coffee and liqueurs Milman explained how, by the use of glass where now was netting, he could regulate the temperature and keep this garden beautiful when snowstorms raged and frost bit viciously.

"YOU have been very patient, gentlemen," Milman began at last, "in not asking me ere this for what reason I invited you. And you have been very courteous to come when my letter might have been construed in an offensive light. I have never met any of you personally before, although I have heard Mr. Bradney lecture and have seen some of Mr. Malet's work. I also was thrilled many years ago by Mr. Barnes's horsemanship.

"It may be that you will consider me guilty of some breach of good form when I mention certain matters in the past life of all three of you. If so, I beg you to believe I shall say nothing idly. I have a definite plan in asking you to meet, and I must tell my story in my own way."

Peter Milman looked from one to another of them a little anxiously.

"So far as I am concerned," said Fleming

Bradney, "you have nothing to fear. I have done nothing to be ashamed of, although I cannot expect the world to believe that."

"My reputation," said Malet, "is a trifle besmirched, but I have long since ceased applying whitewash. Juvenal says that to be poor is to be ridiculous. I can plead guilty to that count."

"Don't mind me," said Barnes genially. "I am used to it. If you'd had all the silly relations I've had, you'd have no sensitive spots left. I have been worthless since birth." He chuckled. "But I've had a good run for my money. Rub it in if it helps you. My wool is black and I know it."

"I'm afraid you don't exactly understand," Peter Milman smiled. "I am neither schoolmaster nor reproving relative. I merely wish to ask your pardon if I talk of things in your lives that may stir up unhappy memories.

"Let me begin with Mr. Fleming Bradney. I have said I once heard him lecture. It was because I read an article of his in the *North American Review* on radio-activity. Until I saw that article I knew nothing of the subject technically. I know almost as little now, but that is not his fault. But what I read and afterward heard him say stirred up my imagination powerfully and I understood that a man may have a passion for knowledge which is a burning hunger.

"I am not a scientifically trained man," Milman went on, "and I cannot give anything but a bare outline of what you said. You had on the table by your side a pound of uranium oxide. You said if you could liberate the energy contained in it you could light New York for a week. You declared that we stood at the threshold of radio-activity as children before lightning, seeing its energy but unable to harness it to our use."

"What I said and wrote was no more than truth," Bradney said, his sensitive face lighting. "Some day a physicist will find out how to do it."

"And then?" Floyd Malet demanded.

"A new day for mankind. No more cold. No more furnaces burning coal to produce light. No longer the need for human beings to be enslaved by the great industries. Light and heat for nothing, whenever or wherever we want it. The beginning of the era of the intellect and the spiritual. The deathblow to the material!" Bradney laughed a little. "Of course people don't believe it. It is too big. It seems too simple. Our present civilization has been merely replacing one expedient for another. When the new era dawns all the present machinery is scrap iron, junk, useless cumbersome metal."

"Will it ever come?" Neeland Barnes asked. He was a skeptic.

"Inevitably. In my experiments I was beginning to get near the outside of it. Perhaps if I had gone on I might have discovered some one fact which could be used with those of other men to bring the great day nearer. The force we need is at our hand but we cannot yet liberate it. So far as we know, radium was once uranium and will some day be lead. It is so little we know. But we are on the right track. I had pledged my life to the service of science"—he shrugged his shoulders—"and I am now an assistant in a commercial laboratory whose job it is to test crude oil."

"The circumstances which led Mr. Bradney to give up his life work and drop out of his world had never been told in their entirety," Peter Milman said, after a pause. "I am going to tell you now. I may say that up to the moment of his retirement we have never had a physicist who gave such promise as he. It is to the honor of a great university in this state that he was elected professor of etheric physics and asked to erect the most superb laboratory for his work that could be built. I think such a chance has rarely been given to one so young. And he lost it and with it the chance of making a career of supreme service to mankind. I wonder if Mr. Bradney would mind telling us how."

"IT IS all so confused and hard to understand," Bradney said slowly. "I am not a business man in any sense. I was convicted by the university authorities of stealing the money entrusted to me to build a laboratory which cost a quarter-million dollars. Not all of it, naturally. I think I was supposed to have made away with something like seventy thousand dollars. The anonymous donor of a hundred thousand dollars whose gift started the thing had expressed a wish that I should have absolute control. It was given me. A contractor showed me how, by using inferior materials, I could make a commission—that's his term for robbery, not mine—of twenty-five thousand. I should have exposed him then and there to the president; but he begged for a chance and it was at a period of my life when I was drunk with the joy of my opportunities. His offer was soon forgotten." Fleming Bradney made a gesture almost of despair. "Somebody got at my papers and altered figures and estimates until even the faculty which wanted to believe in me, believed me guilty. I would not explain. I had the hot anger that innocence feels when it is accused of treachery to its ideals. It was kept out of the papers for the sake of the university, but I was done with. I had no longer any credentials. That is all I know. Naturally I fought, enlisted friends and even lawyers, but I had no money saved and it was useless."

"What did Mr. Milman mean by saying the story had never been told in its entirety?" Floyd Malet demanded. He turned to his host. "Is there anything else to it?"

"A great deal more," said Milman. "Recent exposés of conditions in the building trades make it easier to understand. The man who offered Mr. Bradney a bribe to pass poor construction was not acting for himself. He was a subcontractor who would have made possibly a few hundreds out of it. He was acting for the inevitable 'man higher up,' who was in this case Paul Raxon. Perhaps you have heard of him?"

"Not the man who downed International Motors?" Neeland Barnes cried.

"Yes," Milman replied. "I know a great deal about Paul Raxon. I have followed his career with deep interest. It was Paul Raxon who decreed Professor Bradney's fall. He was used to breaking men who defied him. Of course we shall never get evidence of this. The subcontractor whose living depended upon Raxon's favor would never tell. There was one man who believed in Professor Bradney when the inquiry started. This was the anonymous donor of the hundred thousand dollars."

"I heard of that," Bradney said, "and I begged them to give his name so that I could thank him. I have often vowed if ever it were possible to do something for him I would; but that's unlikely. What could I do, who make a bare livelihood?" Bradney surveyed his garb with scorn. "No decent manservant would admit me to his master's house. I look what I am—a failure—and yet, God knows, not a cent of that money stuck to my fingers. Why on earth should I want money except for my work?"

"THIS Paul Raxon," Milman continued, "is one of the ablest men in New York. No decent man has a chance when pitted against him and his accomplices. He is not of the usual contractor class. He began life as an architect but always desired wealth, and found his profession too slow a method to gain it. Yes," Milman said in a slow, meditative way, "I know a great deal about him. I even subscribed to a clipping bureau so that I may miss nothing. You will be surprised to hear that I had him followed for a long time by a private detective."

"May I ask why?" Bradney returned.

"I shall tell you presently. Let me speak first of the misfortunes, equally undeserved, which befell Mr. Floyd Malet."

The sculptor flushed. "I don't think any one but myself knows what they were!"

"There you are wrong," Milman corrected, gently. "A dozen years ago America discovered that Mr. Malet was a genius. Orders flowed in as they often do when a man has starved long enough. Some of you may have seen the heroic figure of Stonewall Jackson at Raleigh. That established Mr. Malet."

"I remember now," Neeland Barnes exclaimed. "There was some sort of a wild studio party where a woman was killed. But I don't see how that could hurt an artist." Neeland Barnes had formed his opinion of the morals of artists from the fiction writing of sentimental women. "Surely that wouldn't put him down and out."

"It did," Malet answered bitterly. "A sculptor, in this country, depends on commissions from public organizations many of which have women members. When my name was besmirched it was deemed unwise to employ me to decorate buildings consecrated to drama, literature or the arts. Even politics had to be protected from my impure touch! I lost the award I had been definitely promised for a statehouse because my morals were—so the report ran—loose. My failure was just as complete as that of Professor Bradney. I had a little money and that went in lawyers' fees. My friends were few and not influential."

"Had to sell your work at bargain prices, I suppose," Barnes hazarded.

"I had very little to sell. Like Alfred Gilbert I destroyed what I thought was poor and that is why there are only three of my works left in the world today. I have failed. I do not even teach drawing well enough. If I lose the position I hold insecurely, I do not know what will become of me. I have no other ability; but I could have done good work if the incredible had not happened.

"YOU shall judge. A poor girl accosted me on the street and said she was starving. A man who has lived long in Paris thinks nothing of taking a hungry *gamine* to his studio and giving her a real meal and a little money. I remember it was late at night and I found her on a bench in Bryant Park just as the first snow of the year began to fall. I was selfish enough to think her thin, draped figure would do for one of the models of a group I had in mind which was to be called Winter. Not the conventional Winter of frost and ice and skating, but the Winter in great cities where people suffer and die of cold and hunger. She told me something of her history. It was commonplace—the usual story of the ambitious girl trusting too well the man who defers marrying her.

"She shrank from going up in the elevator because she was so shabby, so I helped her up the long flights to my studio. She fainted when she got there and I gave her brandy. She was so ill that I wanted to send for a doctor. She telephoned. I did not hear the number but I knew it must be to the man she spoke. Very reluctantly he agreed to come and see her. I think the fact that I insisted on speaking was the cause. Perhaps he imagined I knew his name and more about him."

"Then you didn't know who he was?"

Floyd Malet shook his head. "Nor do I now; but I remember him distinctly. He was a thin man with a black mustache and brown eyes with red flecks in them. I knew he was a man who had been successful with women. I met him at the entrance. He wore a fur coat whose collar concealed his face. Outside it was still snowing hard. I did not like his manner; there was a snarl in it. Perhaps my studio—you know what a dirty, unluxurious place a sculptor's workshop is—did not impress him. The girl had died while I was waiting for him. He cried out that it was a trick I had played him. Then he ran out for a doctor and the police." Malet shrugged his shoulders. "I never saw him again. Sometimes I wonder if he was run over and killed or if, when he found I did not know his name and did not find any letters in the girl's pocket, he left me to bear the blame."

"Blame?" cried Bradney. "Is a man blamed in a heartless town like this if he does a kind action?"

"I sent for a doctor who in turn sent for the police. When I told them the story of the man with the fur coat whose face I could not see distinctly, whose name I did not know and of whose address I was unaware, I could see they thought me lying. And when I told them the girl had not taken the elevator I could see they thought it was a vulgar intrigue."

"But the man with the fur coat didn't walk up," Neeland Barnes reminded him.

"But the elevator boy denied having seen him. It was my word against his. The record of the telephone call could not be traced. I made a bad witness. Nobody identified the girl and as I admitted giving her brandy the thing was treated in the papers as a drunken debauch and I was marked as a Parisian decadent. It was my finish. One always behaves unwisely in cases of that sort. I lost my temper in court. I had no strong, temperate friend to help me."

Malet sank down in his chair. The sensitive face was marked by suffering. The stamp of realized failure was upon him.

"And so," he said after a pause, "I earn my living teaching drawing to those who are not interested. In my room I try to think that I could have done something in the world if I had had my chance. Perhaps the hardest thing of all is not to be consumed in my own bitterness. Professor Bradney's rank is assured. He has the books he wrote, the lectures he delivered and the record of his experiments. Two or three times I have thought of saving some money and going down to Raleigh to see my Lee statue. Then something holds me back. Perhaps it is that I am afraid. I may be a coward enough to want to think it good work and afraid to put it to the test in the light of my present knowledge."

Malet shivered a little as a light wind swept along the little garden. He rose from his chair and held out his hand to his host.

"You have made me forget and you have made me remember," he said. "I am grateful, Mr. Milman."

"But I cannot let you go yet," said the other. "There should be some cedar logs already blazing in the drawing-room." He turned to the others. "We shall find it more agreeable in the house." He put his arm in that of the sculptor. "Never think you are a failure," he said earnestly. "Your Lee is one of the few great things we have."

"You are saying that to hearten me," Malet answered.

"Am I?" Peter Milman laughed. "You shall judge for yourself."

Although the drawing-room was a finely proportioned apartment and contained many beautiful things, Malet had eyes only for his marble group which stood near the window. He had never learned where this work was that he believed to be his best. He approached it almost nervously. Was he to find, after all, that he was only one of the second-raters? The group had been exhibited under the name of "The Settlers" and represented one of those heroic American families of Colonial days standing at bay, facing death at the hands of King Philip's Indian warriors.

None spoke as he gazed at it. Even Barnes felt that the emotion which he could not fathom had in it some unusual quality. There were tears in Floyd Malet's eyes and his voice was husky as he turned to Peter Milman.

"Yes," he said in a low voice, "it is good. I should have been among the great ones."

"You are among them," Milman assured him.

WHEN midnight was passed and the four men were comfortably seated about the fire, Neeland Barnes began to think there was to be no more unmasking of his past. In a sense he was glad. These two men whom he had begun by despising seemed, after all, to have once cut considerable figures. Barnes was a shrewd judge of men. He thought that they had spoken only the truth. The big man with the eager, gray eyes was most certainly no grafter. And now he believed absolutely in Floyd Malet's integrity. In comparison, Neeland Barnes, professional man-of-the-world, felt rather a poor specimen.

"We now come," said Milman, breaking in on his reflections, "to the case of Mr. Neeland Barnes."

Mr. Neeland Barnes groaned inwardly. Outwardly he was urbane and gracious.

"Mr. Barnes," said Peter Milman, "is not so complex a type as his fellow-guests. He aimed rather at physical attributes than intellectual or artistic achievements. And he succeeded just as they did. I doubt if there is an American living who surpassed Mr. Barnes in certain phases of sport. He was a great polo player, a great cross-country rider, the only American amateur to win the English Grand National Steeplechase, the most severe in the world.

"He was a man who might have passed a blameless life had his money lasted. There came a time when his relatives would not help and his horses could not win. Finally he was accused of some trickery at Saratoga and found his racing career at an end. An uncle from whom he expected much believed the worst and cut him out of his will. Since then he has been living insecurely on what his few remaining relatives choose to give him."

"Mr. Milman," Barnes said, "I have been almost every sort of a fool in my day. I have thrown fortunes away and gambled and drunk like a madman, but I never pulled any dirty tricks on a racetrack. I was always out to win and never betted against my own horses. I'm not what you might call a reliable man and I've done things I'm heartily ashamed of now, but I did not do what the Saratoga stewards believed of me."

"What did they believe?" Bradney demanded.

"My trainer gave evidence before them that I instructed him to dope my entry for the Saratoga Cup so that I might bet on another horse. Mine was the favorite. It did go to the post full of bromide and the horse I was reputed to have bet on won at long odds. I had the trainer against me and the bookmaker, and, because I was known to be in monetary difficulties, I was disbelieved. Not that I blame the stewards. They did their duty as they saw it. Somebody fixed my trainer and the jockey. I was forced out of the racing game, I hadn't a friend in the world, and my wife was dead. Consequently, I went to the devil. I used what money I could get hold of to fight the thing, but the man, or men, who framed me had more money. I shall never know who it was."

"I know," said Peter Milman quietly. "You were not framed, as you term it, by any crooked owner of thoroughbreds. Your downfall came because you threw a man from the pier at Narragansett into the Atlantic Ocean. Do you remember.?"

"Yes," said Barnes slowly. "I think I do. There was a woman mixed up in it but I forget her name now. She was one of those little fluffy blondes that were fashionable that season. Ah, I have it. She was a roof-garden star. A man came up and tried to make a scene. My Aunt Sarah, who was most particular, was coming toward us. The thing would have been most disastrous because I had turned over a new leaf the previous evening and a codicil was to be added to her will. Fortunately the man struck at me and I thought the simplest way out of it was to drop him into the sea. Aunt Sarah, being short-sighted, did not even see him disappear." Mr. Barnes mused on the thing for a few moments. "It was most extraordinary; I never saw him again. There was no summons, no publicity—nothing. I was a bit uneasy at first lest he should have been drowned, but somebody saw him crawl ashore. I never knew his name and I never saw the blonde again. While Aunt Sarah was there I lived blamelessly. She used to say I was not really bad, but only unreliable. Used to call me Ephraim. I never knew why."

"The man you threw into the water was the man who arranged matters so that you should be compelled to give up racing." There was a trace of triumph in Mr. Milman's manner. "You will never be able to prove it, so don't try."

"And I hoped he didn't drown!" said Barnes, looking about for sympathy. "What's his name?" Barnes did not doubt his host's sincerity for a moment.

"FIRST let me show you his photograph," said Milman. He unlocked a drawer and took out the picture from an envelope. "That is the man to whom you all owe your misfortunes—Paul Raxon."

None of Milman's guests had ever before seen a photograph of Raxon. He had a knack of outwitting the newspaper photographers. It had come to be understood that to attempt to photograph him was to incur the enmity of a man who never forgave or forgot.

"That he broke Professor Bradney was a precautionary measure, and not born of any personal malice. As to Mr. Malet, that was merely bad luck and not design as in the first instance. I don't suppose Raxon had anything personal against him, but he recognized the opportunity to escape from a troublesome position. The only purely personal spite was in the case of Mr. Neeland Barnes. Raxon was intending to buy a big house at Narragansett and entertain lavishly."

"I don't remember the name there," said Barnes.

"He left the pier," Milman answered. "Raxon is curiously sensitive to ridicule. He could not remain to be pointed out as the man Neeland Barnes had contemptuously tossed into the ocean. It took him several years to get his revenge, but it was a complete one. He boasts that he never lets up and ascribes Indian ancestry to this unamiable quality. His most spectacular hatred was that my poor friend Hazen Brewer incurred."

"I don't understand why he killed himself," said Barnes. "I knew Brewer pretty well years ago and he didn't look like a man who would quit under fire." He turned again and pulled his long mustache. "For the life of me I don't see how cattle like this make a hit with women."

"Brewer committed suicide," said Milman, ignoring Barnes's last sentence, "because he had plunged into penury a man who was near and dear to him. This was a man unused to finance who trusted Brewer with his fortune and mortgaged his home in a vain effort to save his friend. Brewer felt disgraced. I think this emotion was far more potent than the fact of his own financial collapse. He had pledged his word of honor that he would win. He knew himself to be as able as Raxon and he had greater experience in Wall Street. I do not think he realized with what corrupt political gangs Raxon had been affiliated, nor their power until too late. He did not realize that his friend harbored no hard thoughts of him and would have made no complaints. After all, the friend's loss was very little compared with his downfall."

Fleming Bradney, perhaps the closest observer of Milman's guests, was becoming possessed with a vast impatience to know for what reason he had been summoned. Milman had established the fact that the misfortunes of his guests were due to Paul Raxon. He had permitted his guests to assert that they were failures and had no chance of regaining the opportunities which had once been theirs.

"All you have done," said Bradney, who was suddenly assailed with doubts as to Milman's ultimate purpose, "is to get us here and show us what failures we are. That is not kind unless you have a remedy. Don't you see it puts us in a very poor light? A man may fail and still retain his self-respect. I decline to consider myself a black sheep. You tell me Paul Raxon ruined my career. I shall make a point of seeing the editors of all the great New York papers and telling them what you have said. Too long a certain type of man has ruled our cities in the name of democracy."

There was no doubt now about Peter Milman's uneasiness as he listened.

"I thought you understood," he said quietly, "that this conversation was privileged. If you go to your editors you will do two things: One will be to convince them that you have brooded so long on your troubles that you are mad; the other will be to disclose the confidences a dead man gave me."

"Which you have broken," Bradney said.

"For a purpose," Milman conceded. "I did not tell you idly."

"But you want me to give up the only chance I may ever have of clearing my name," Bradney complained.

"You can never clear it that way. I don't think you can ever hope to defeat Paul Raxon that way." His tone changed a little. "Tell me this, Mr. Bradney. Which counts more with you; the clearing of your name of suspicions of dishonesty—not actual conviction of it, remember, for your case never came before a court of law—or the opportunity to devote your life to your chosen science?"

"The latter, of course," Bradney cried.

"And you?" Milman said, turning to the sculptor.

"If enough mud is thrown at a man, no matter how innocent he is, some of it will stick. I have long since abandoned any hope of being whitewashed. In a sense the equipment of the sculptor is expensive. If I were a painter it would be a different thing. There is no institution to endow broken, middle-aged men."

"IT IS for that reason I asked you all to come here," Milman answered. "You don't understand? Gentlemen, I am a broken and a middle-aged man. In Hazen Brewer's failure my entire fortune went. I mortgaged this house to help him. Out of the wreck I may save enough to live in a couple of humble rooms for the rest of my life. We are all in the same boat, all four of us victims to Paul Raxon's whims."

"You?" Neeland Barnes cried. "You had all sorts of money, I thought."

"I have enough to live on in this house for three months. Then the mortgage will fall due. There will be an auction sale and an end of the New York Milmans," he paused, "unless—"

Peter Milman's answer amazed them all. He was confident without being assertive.

"I am going to get my money back from Raxon," he said.

"But you've said he's above the law," Bradney retorted.

"And I mean it. I had not thought of invoking that sort of law. There is an older one."

Malet looked at him in sudden comprehension. This was not merely a quiet, middle-aged gentleman who faced them. It was an avenger.

To Barnes it seemed that madness had seized upon the recluse of lower Fifth Avenue. Peter Milman represented to him all the conventions of an established order, an order which frowned upon the ways of adventurers.

"One man wouldn't have a chance against Raxon," he exclaimed. "Beside that, you're not that sort of man."

"My dear sir," said Milman, and there was a queer smile on his face, "for what purpose do you suppose I have invited to my house three men who might, but for Paul Raxon, have been rich and famous? Was it merely coincidental that you three should have been his victims while I made up a fourth?"

Peter Milman was by all odds the calmest of them all. Even Bradney, the slowest to be influenced, experienced an emotion of excitement.

"The only point now to be decided," Peter Milman went on, "is whether or not you will join me." He looked from one to another of them with that curiously steady gaze of his. It was the expression that Captain Oliver had lent him, an expression which would have been a puzzle to those who had known him well in other days. "Well, gentlemen, what is it to be?"

FOR the moment none of them could estimate with any exactness just what risks he was asking them to run. They knew only that this man of blameless life, distinguished family and assured social position, was calmly proposing to engage them in a conspiracy to take from Paul Raxon some of those many dollars his unscrupulous conduct had won.

"Naturally," Milman continued, "you are too much surprised to have your answers ready. You cannot believe that I am serious. You say to yourselves that this is not the house of a pauper and that I must be jesting. Or you may think for unguessed reasons that I am trying to trap you into damaging admissions. I repeat in all seriousness that I am ruined. I have some inconsiderable assets which may be untouched, but all the things of value in this house—and there are many—will be sold, because Paul Raxon ruined my closest friend. And he murdered him, gentlemen." Milman's voice was sterner now. "Raxon has brought me to an impoverished and friendless end. Unless I struggle against it I shall join those innumerable victims his career has involved. My proposition is most certainly a reasonable one. Since Paul Raxon by illegal means—or let me say inequitable means—has brought us to what we are and driven my dear friend to a suicide's grave, I purpose to pool our abilities and enthusiasms and make him pay something in return."

Milman's remarks were addressed mainly to Bradney; he was assured of Barnes and he had seen an eagerness about Floyd Malet. It was Fleming Bradney who was frowning.

"This is too important a thing to settle offhand," said Milman. "You will, of course, spend the night here. Your rooms are ready for you. Perhaps at breakfast in my Japanese garden you will see things without distortion. I shall make no new effort to persuade you. I will say only this: if you want proofs that Raxon is the cause of your troubles, I cannot give them. He is not the sort of man who can be convicted by any ordinary processes. If you want my word of honor as a gentleman that I am certain he is to blame, I give it to you readily."

Milman pushed the button that summoned Achille Lutry. It was plain he wished no further discussion. Only Bradney made a protest.

"I'm in evening dress. I can't go back to the works like this tomorrow morning."

"I do not think you will ever go back there," Peter Milman said, smiling. "It may be that you think otherwise and will miss a day. If so, I have provided you against monetary loss. Come, gentlemen, be my guests tomorrow."

"I'm with you," said Neeland Barnes promptly. "Count on me tomorrow and the day after and as long as you like. If any hair-splitting, moralizing coward tries to persuade himself that he hasn't got a grievance against Paul Raxon let him go home, set the alarm, get up at daybreak and punch the clock when the whistle blows."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said Peter Milman, "please do not quarrel. Professor Bradney has risen superior to personal enmities. He has forgiven Raxon. I confess that I have not."

Bradney looked coldly at Neeland Barnes.

"Mr. Barnes," he said, "has courage and a tendency to quarrel. Most men have. It requires greater courage to estimate the risks of such an undertaking as this and then enter it without heat or rancor. I am not a coward morally or physically; and if Mr. Barnes thinks so, he is as poor a judge of men as he is of the consideration he owes a fellow guest."

"My fault, my fault entirely," Barnes murmured. He had seen in Bradney's eyes no trace of fear. He was conscious that old New York had not performed according to traditional form. "Noblesse oblige," he added seriously. "A little excited." He waved an arm which included the whole of the luxurious room. "Sudden change from a hovel furnished by a man called Lippsky. Went to my head. Haven't been inside a decent house for years." He was relieved when Bradney smiled at him.

"It is late," said Peter Milman, "so I think we had better arrange to breakfast together at nine. You will find night-gear and dressing-gowns in your rooms."

He shook them all by the hand. Bradney had the feeling of being sent to bed like a child. He was no less excited in his own way than was Neeland Barnes. There was something under the courteous exterior of Peter Milman which he had not yet solved. Was his air of certainty born of a normal, calculating mind or of a brain disordered by brooding and seclusion? He knew nothing about Peter Milman. Many times his work had stirred benevolent and unknown gentlemen to inarticulate enthusiasms.

BRADNEY'S room was separated from that occupied by Floyd Malet by a bathroom. He rapped at the door and was bidden to enter.

"Sorry to bother you," said Bradney, "but I'd like to discuss this thing with you. I'll admit it obsesses me entirely. Selfishly, I'm bound to say. My life has only one love and that's my work." He hesitated a moment. "If I thought there really was a chance of being able to get control of a physical laboratory again, independent of outside interference and subsidized to insure continuous experimentation, there is nothing I would not do."

Floyd Malet did not speak for a little while. Very much the same thoughts had passed through his own mind. It was as grotesque to see himself trying to explain what perspective meant to uninterested pupils as it was to imagine Fleming Bradney in the laboratory of a commercial concern performing his routine work no better than the lad who stood next to him.

"I don't mind saying," the sculptor remarked, "that my present existence is so distasteful that prison has no horrors for me."

"Exactly," Bradney said quickly. "Will it lead to prison? You see, we should not go to prison as heroes but as miserable little blackmailers or something of the sort. Is this man sane? That's the thing which bothers me. I've never heard of him before. What is his family history? Is this a great delusion? Has he brooded so long that he has become abnormal? He knows about you and me and Barnes, but what do we know of him?"

"Let's ask Barnes. They have common friends, as we learned at dinner. At one time or another Barnes moved in the same set. He's in the room at the end of this corridor. I rather like Barnes. You can see he's willing to be first or second murderer whenever called upon."

Neeland Barnes was stretched on a chaise longue. Over his pajamas was a rich lounging-robe of blue silk. At his elbow a table supported a decanter of brandy and a bottle of Seltzer water.

"Come in," he cried genially. "I raced in France for three years and acquired a knowledge of the language. It comes in very handy in dealing with men like Achille. Please help yourself." He had entirely forgotten his temporary annoyance at Fleming Bradney, which had sprung less from dislike of him than a desire to come to the aid of his host.

"Look here, Barnes," Bradney began earnestly. "Tell me, what do you think Mr. Milman really means?"

"I think he's got a plan up his sleeve to trim this Raxon and share the profits with us. The idea suits me down to the ground. If you could see Lippsky's ideas of house-furnishing you would not wonder that I'm ripe for anything.' '

"Do you think Milman is sane?"

"Haven't a doubt of it! Why should you?"

"His amazing proposition, for one thing: he doesn't belong to the criminal class and yet he proposes to extract enough money from Raxon to pay back his own losses and endow my laboratory and start Malet again and give you a new chance. We know very well that Raxon won't give up money unless forced to. To use force is a criminal undertaking."

"Not as I look at it," said Barnes easily. "Raxon in my opinion is an outlaw."

"But the law," Bradney insisted. "The law doesn't admit that. To the rest of the world he is a great man."

"We know he's a crook, so what do we care for the world?" Barnes was evidently not be shaken.

Bradney tried another tack. "Is there any insanity in the Milman family?"

"Not that I ever heard of. The Milmans have always been shrewd, conservative men. Nobody ever heard of them giving away fortunes to charities or writing poetry or supporting ladies of the chorus. They hate publicity and rarely hold public office. A clean-bred crowd, if you ask me, with no degenerates in it. Poor old Peter's the last of 'em and the best. It may be there's something crazy in wanting to live down here and yet, when I see what a beautiful home he's got and think of my shack at Peekskill, I understand why he wants to fight to keep it."

Barnes nodded a genial good night to his visitors. He did not understand why they hung back. Already he was visioning the future. He would buy a great ranch in California, and there with splendid horses to ride, he would pass the rest of his days; and of course he would have his daughter. But Barnes had been through more violence than his friends knew of and he did not underestimate the risks that were ahead.

WHEN the three men in evening dress were summoned to breakfast in the Japanese garden they found their host similarly clad. Whether he had not been to bed or whether he had dressed thus to make their own garb less singular they did not know. They knew only that they found him free from embarrassment and as courteously considerate as he had been at dinner. Not during the meal was anything said about his proposition. Milman talked freely of his garden and the rare plants in it.

A little dial at his side attracted Bradney's notice. He saw that a wire was attached to it, leading to the north wall.

"A little burglar device of my own," Milman explained. "By it I am enabled to detect the presence of anything on the iron screen which shuts this place in. For example, if I find the dial indicates five pounds and that the object is moving I can tell almost certainly it is a wandering cat. If a hundred and sixty pounds I can be sure of a burglar looking for an opening. Cats are frequent visitors. In the score of years this garden has existed I have had no more than seven burglars."

"What happens to them?" Barnes asked. "How do you get them?"

"I extinguish the lights and the shades are drawn back. By illuminating the marked area I see the intruder and have him at my mercy. I keep a loaded shotgun handy and there is seldom any difficulty in the matter. Only one ever got through. The alarm must have been out of order for he sawed his way in during dinner and broke his neck on a stone known, very amusingly, as the Stone of the Respectful Visitor. I am well protected here. I have had time to elaborate certain devices which make me feel perfectly safe. The police assure me that my cellar is the attraction. It is stored with what was laid down many years ago and the law allows me to keep."

Watching the speaker carefully, Bradney came to the conclusion that he was wholly sane. Bradney had not slept well; there had been too much to think about. He could not be satisfied with his position at the refinery, for he saw himself dropping lower and lower in the social scale. Even though he were fortunate enough to retain his position it was distasteful work.

"I've made up my mind," said Bradney, when Achille had gone. "I'm with you."

"I thought you would be when you had time to reflect that what is unlawful is not always inequitable. I am very grateful. And you, Mr. Malet?"

"Count me in."

"I don't think Mr. Milman has any doubts about me," Neeland Barnes remarked.

Peter Milman smiled a little. He rather liked this big man. "I have no doubts about you. Now that we are agreed, let us discuss the thing."

"FIRST of all," Bradney said, "what are your plans?"

"I have no plan of campaign, yet," Milman returned. "I see that you look disappointed. Evidently you expected me to have the whole thing cut and dried. That, gentlemen, seems unreasonable. What object would I have in inviting you here if I were able to accomplish the thing alone? I approach the problem with an open mind. My contribution toward it will be to entertain you for three months. If at the end of that time we are unsuccessful, this house will no longer be my home. We shall have failed and if we are still at large there will be five hundred dollars each for you. All expenses will be borne by me. I hope you are not dismayed by my news. I do not think you will be. You have not been chosen idly. In Professor Bradney we have great intellect fit to expend itself on our common problem. In Mr. Malet we have the quick mind and vivid imagination of the artist. Mr. Neeland Barnes brings to us physical prowess and an extensive knowledge of the underworld and its ways. My contribution seems small by comparison."

"First," said Fleming Bradney, "let us examine all documents bearing on the subject. I assume you have data concerning Paul Raxon, Mr. Milman?"

"I have a great deal," said his host. "I know details of his personal and business life that he cannot possibly suspect."

"But how," Bradney asked, "if you rarely go out and never receive visitors can you get at this information which must most surely be very difficult of access?"

"In the beginning by design. I was determined to find out what forces had pulled you and Malet down. Later, by accident. I spoke not long ago of my cellar. My father laid down a great deal of port in 1871, when I was born. A lawyer named Loddon who has acted for me for some years is also Raxon's confidential attorney. His name never appears publicly in Raxon's affairs. He is engaged mainly in keeping his client clear of the effects of early indiscretions. Loddon has dined with me many times, and this port induces amazing loquacity in him. If I have doubted his assertions he has boasted the more loudly. These dinners became at last a most interesting part of my life. I drew him on deliberately, never permitting him to see my keenness." Milman smiled. "For every bottle of my port Loddon drank he repaid me a hundredfold. It was when Lodden learned that Malet had made 'The Settlers' that he told me in so many words that his client was responsible for the sculptor's downfall. I will not weary you with details. I have a careful record of every conversation."

"I don't understand how a man could be so unwise as to talk about such dangerous matters," Bradney remarked.

"Loddon once said that dead men and I could tell no tales. It soothed his ego to talk and he believed me harmless. Yes, gentlemen, I know a great deal about Paul Raxon."

"And you think he'll be easy to defeat?" Bradney asked.

"No more dangerous man lives in all New York," Peter Milman said gravely. "That is why I have been so careful in selecting my companions."

ALTHOUGH Paul Raxon had always professed a great belief in his own destiny, he had never thought to be a multimillionaire. He found himself suddenly a national figure. It amused him to read newspaper accounts of himself. People assumed that he had newly come to New York, whereas he had been for years a power working through other men.

It was as an architect's clerk he discovered the graft that was possible in the building trade. Among the group of illiterate men who were holding up big jobs and levying blackmail from contractors in the name of Labor, he soon became a leader. He was cautious, educated and supremely cunning. The price of success was the betrayal of his benefactor and he had not hesitated to make it.

At the age of forty-two he took his place with the living powers in Wall Street, hated by many, liked by few, but despised by none. Publicity overwhelmed him at last.

Mrs. Raxon and her family returned from Europe, where for some years they had lived. At a large price he purchased Great Rock, formerly the home of Bellington of the Traction Trust, and he entertained in the manner of the very rich. Loddon, his lawyer, was enchanted with it. As Loddon was Raxon's most intimate friend he could open his heart freely and voice his dislike of having to be civil to strangers.

At this period of his life the idea of power obsessed him. He did not want to run the risk of losing what he had gained. He was not anxious for any unsavory episodes of his past to arise. There had been many, and women were concerned with most of them. He grew less interested in women as the idea of senatorial honors forced themselves upon him. Senator Raxon of New York! No state honors for him! He would be sent to Washington. Loddon licked his thick lips at the thought.

Raxon was a tired-looking man, slim and a little stooped. He had fine hands and good features. He could bring readily to his aid the salesman's forced enthusiasm which seemed genuine to those who did not know him intimately. For years now, he had been living among men immeasurably beneath him in intelligence; a lucky turn had made him independent of them.

For the moment Great Rock took much of his time. There were many features in its construction which offended his nicer taste. He encouraged the rumor that he had once been a student of the Beaux Arts in Paris. When his wife complained that the Raxons had no coat of arms he suggested a fox as the family emblem. He was under no illusion about the friendship or loyalty of those about him, for he believed that all men would sell to the highest bidder.

To go to the Senate from New York would be an expensive matter and to that end it would be necessary to conserve his fortune. His wife, after years of living in second-rate hotels, was inclined to reckless extravagance. Raxon knew that the life of relatively small things was over. Not again would he deal with the baser sort of men. Albany would give way to Washington and he would be a statesman instead of a politician. In his heart he knew there was little difference and he smiled at the thought. Much of his amusement came from watching the men he controlled try to assert themselves. There was Loddon, for example, a shyster lawyer at heart, for whom he had obtained a partnership in a respectable firm. The good fortune had gone to the man's head; he wished Raxon to regard him as an equal rather than to snap orders at him. He even ventured to disagree with his patron.

"MY SUCCESS," Raxon said, stopping him with a gesture, "is due to two things. One is a total absence of pity; another, that I use only those men whom I can crush if they get out of hand. Jim Caffray was one. He is compromised so deeply that be dare not open his mouth to try and drag me down. You're another." He looked at the gross, formless creature and sneered. "When I pipe, you shall dance; and if you don't dance to my liking, what happens? The Bar Association will disbar you. You may try to incriminate me but you haven't a shred of evidence of anything crooked; not a check, letter, telegram or dictaphone conversation. Keep me in a good humor, Loddon, and work for me and you'll go far. Try to be independent, or indiscreet, and I'll break you. Remember that you're dancing on the rim of hell and that I can push you over if you get out of hand."

"Why, Paul," Loddon cried, "what's got into you? I'm the most loyal follower you ever had, and you know it!"

Raxon smiled. "I want intelligent loyalty and you're not overburdened with intelligence any more than Caffray was. I'm not underestimating you. You've been useful to me in a number of ways."

"Thank you," said Loddon, almost bitterly. He thought of certain unprofessional things he had done at his patron's bidding which had, in effect, delivered him bound hand and foot to Raxon.

That the financier aspired to a United States Senatorship seemed a laudable enough ambition. That he had a chance seemed, on reflection, almost absurd. And yet Raxon was not a man to delude himself. Loddon voiced his doubts.

"McKimber is the party's nominee," he observed. "Of course he'll carry New York, and they say he'll get more votes up-state than any other possible candidate."

"The party will get the votes, not the man," said Raxon.

"But McKimber's the party's choice," Loddon persisted.

"It looks that way, doesn't it?" Raxon smiled. "McKimber's very popular."

"You're keeping something back," said Loddon.

"I always do. That's why I get on. That's why I'm going to the Senate."

He was interrupted by Mrs. Raxon. She was a handsome, dark woman who had just discovered that while she was living abroad her husband had become enormously wealthy. Her sense of a personal grievance against him was highly developed. He could see she was prepared for battle.

"I want a suitable allowance for myself and the children," she began. "I want a banking account and my own limousine and chauffeur." She threw down the gage and waited, a little frightened, for what might follow. Paul had always seemed incomprehensible; she did not understand him now. When he smiled it was, she supposed, the prelude to some biting sarcasm.

"Certainly," he said. "A very good idea. Fortunately Loddon is here." She turned, a little startled to see the lawyer. "Talk it over with him. I am very willing that you should take your place in society. I ask only that you will be careful with what people you fill my house. I am going to make this the most beautiful estate in America, a real show place, and we don't want any of the old crowd. Wanton extravagance is always silly and I don't think you are silly, Marie. I'm after big game, and if I rise you'll go up with me. Talk it over with Herman." He smiled and walked slowly from the room.

"Now what do you make of that?" she demanded when he had gone. "He hasn't spoken as pleasantly as that for years."

"I've given up trying to understand him," the lawyer retorted, "but making hay while the sun shines is a good old proverb. How much do you want?"

WHILE Marie Raxon was passing an enthralling hour in discovering her many needs, and her husband was wondering how he might best beautify Bellington's enormous building, three men in lower Fifth Avenue were discussing his ruin.

Malet had returned from Philadelphia, where he had given up his position. Already another laboratory assistant had taken Bradney's place. The two had yielded to Peter Milman's importunities and had agreed to remain as his guests. Neeland Barnes had not yet come back from Peekskill. He had gone with the avowed intention of paying Lippsky something on account.

The three other men were discovering that a determination to engage in even the most extreme measures against Raxon did not bring them any nearer to the solution of the problem. It would be easy enough to injure him or even to abduct him. But a dead or injured Raxon would pay no dividends. An abducted financier would be a more likely proposition; but his captors were not of the sort to apply torture. They lacked the heartlessness of the professional kidnaper even as they lacked his technique. They examined innumerable schemes and found flaws in them all. The small regard they had, as men of superior mental attainments, for Neeland Barnes changed perceptibly. He of them all was a man of action, whose devotion to physical exercises had brought him a certain preëminence. They chafed at his delay.

In Lippsky's front yard the aggrieved landlord was trying to bring to maturity depressed-looking vegetables. His eyes glistened when he saw Neeland Barnes approaching. In his mind there was a scheme whereby he could either get the rent or disgrace his tenant. He dropped his spade and hurried toward him.

"Was you expecting a lady?" he demanded.

"Good Lord, no!" Barnes stopped instantly. Although his immediate past was clear of entanglements, there had been a time—he usually referred to it as the period when he "went to the devil"—when he had been less discreet. Had old ghosts arisen to confound him?

"Has any woman the right to go in and monkey about with your things?"

"Absolutely no!" Barnes cried.

"Mr. Barnes," said Lippsky, shrilly, "you are a loafer. You sent her in to get your clothes so you could leave me without nothing to hold. I got your number and, by golly, I got hers. I locked her in and I tell her if she makes a fuss I send for the police. You thought I'd be out; you know this is my lodge night."

"I didn't know there was a lodge low enough to admit you," Barnes said angrily, "and I sent nobody here. Send for the police. I've had enough of your damned insolence."

"Pretending she was a fine lady," said Lippsky with growing anger. "Looking at me and my house as though I was dirt! She wouldn't believe you lived here. I tell her right quick you wouldn't be living even here if you didn't come across with the rent. I tell her this is not a home for loafers."

Neeland Barnes removed his silk hat and mopped his brow.

"My good ass," he began, "what the devil are you ranting about?"

"I tell her," Lippsky went on unappeased, "you could go out with your fine gentleman's clothes and silk hat and treat me like dirt. I'm a citizen here same as you and this is an end of you walking over me. I tell her to scream all she likes; nobody hears away up here."

"You mean to say you've locked a strange woman up in my room?"

"It's my house. If you pay the rent you can go in and get your clothes. If you don't, you stay out." Feverishly Lippsky destroyed whatever chance of life a row of kohlrabi might have had. Then, when he saw his tenant march toward the shack he followed.

"One of them yellow-hairs," he scolded, as he trotted by the tall man's side. "A swell lady who said she didn't know how you could live in such a pigsty. She called my house a pigsty. Well, she's been locked up in a pigsty since dinner time."

Suddenly Barnes's powerful hand seized Lippsky.

"If you don't give me the key," he said, "I'll twist your arm out of its socket." He turned the other's wrist a little. "Yell all you like," he added pleasantly. "Nobody hears away up here."

"You shall sleep in the jail for this," Lippsky cried when the key was forced from him.

"It will be less verminous than this place," Barnes answered. He put his key in the door and threw it open, wholly at a loss to know who the invader would be.

THE noise of his entrance awoke her. She was a tall, slim girl with golden hair, in a white knitted sport suit.

"Darling Daddy!" she cried, throwing her arms around his neck.

"Nita, Nita," he said, stroking her hair. "How I have longed for you! But my dear, how is it you are here?"

"I ran away," she confessed. "They said such utterly beastly things about you I couldn't stand it. How well you look, Daddy! I shall call you my big brother. Nobody will believe you're my father. What makes you stay in such a funny place as this?" Suddenly she caught sight of Lippsky. "Who is that dreadful little creature?"

Lippsky answered her.

"I own this house and I've come for the rent. If he don't pay he goes to sleep in jail. I guess he don't mind that. I guess it ain't for the first time. He ain't got no money. You say he's your father—" Lippsky grinned. "Well, you got the chance to save your daddy from the jail."

"Dad," she whispered, "I hadn't any idea it was as bad as this. I've only three dollars left. The boat trip took all my savings."

"My dear girl," he said easily, "this man is known widely as the village idiot. Nobody believes him. It does happen that my rent is due. By the way, how much is it?"

"Seventy-five dollars rent; fifteen dollars and eighty cents I lent you for tobacco money. Ninety dollars, eighty cents."

"I rather thought it was more," said Barnes.

He took out a roll of bills and paid. He was left with seven dollars. His reward came in the relief the girl showed.

"It's a fad of mine, staying up here," he admitted. "The air is good and I've been in training. I shall leave now. I think we'll go to New York as soon as possible. How lovely you look! You have those unforgettable violet eyes of your mother, but you are taller." The thought that he had nowhere to take her made him miserable but he would not let her see it. It was incomprehensible to him that the Countess of Horsham, his late wife's eldest sister, had allowed her niece to come. The countess had always been his enemy.

"It came to a point," the girl said when they were in the New York train, "when I was asked to drop my own name and take my mother's. Not that I minded being Nita Fessendon except that it seemed as though I were publicly ashamed of you. I simply refused. There were awful rows, so I ran away."

"But they could have fetched you back," he said. He remembered the domineering ways of the Boston Fessendons and that member of the family who had married the late Earl of Horsham.

"They tried to, but I was twenty-one and my own mistress. I sent all the jewels and presents back and started to earn my living."

"Nita!" he cried, with admiration in his look. "How could you possibly do what I've always failed in doing?"

"WHERE are we going, Daddy?" she demanded after she had passed Singsing's embattled walls.

"I'm staying with Peter Milman," he answered. "Lady Horsham may have mentioned him."

"I remember. His wife ran away and he shut himself up in his house and went mad."

"That is just what your aunt would say," he returned. "He did not go mad. He happens to be the best friend I have and I shall ask him to let you stay the night there. Much better than a stuffy, noisy hotel."

"And tomorrow we'll get a cozy little flat. I've often wanted to look over the treetops into Central Park."

"I'm afraid cozy little flats on Fifth Avenue where you were born aren't exactly within my means. The view is just as pretty from Central Park West." He groaned to think that that was as difficult to attain.

"Anything you like," she said happily. The fact that her aunt had declared it impossible to know people living on the Park's western side did not distress her in the least. Her father was probably a far better judge of New York's select areas than the expatriated Countess of Horsham.

Peter Milman and his two guests had finished dinner and were in the large drawing room when Achille came in with the news that Neeland Barnes had returned with a lady.

Bradney looked at Malet and shook his head. It was in Bradney's mind that Barnes had spent his money on liquid refreshment and had so far forgotten himself as to seek to introduce a lady. He could see that Peter Milman was much disturbed.

A moment later Neeland Barnes was introducing a very pretty, gracious girl as a Miss Anita Barnes, newly come from England. Peter Milman's annoyance was banished momentarily as he thought of the ramifications of Barnes's family tree. The girl must be a distant cousin. He greeted her with distinguished courtesy and introduced the other men.

"Her arrival in America is most unexpected," Neeland Barnes began. "I feel as if I had come in for a fortune." He smiled at his daughter. "I have, and that's a fact. She has been living with her aunt in England."

"Till I couldn't stand it any longer," Nita informed them.

Barnes was evidently troubled about something. For a moment he sought some way in which he might contrive to speak privately with Milman. At last he hit upon it.

"I wonder," he said ingenuously, "whether Mr. Malet would mind showing you the Japanese garden? You'll be simply crazy over it, especially the Stone of the Unfortunate Burglar. Mr. Malet understands these things so much better than I do." He winked ponderously at the sculptor.

"A Japanese garden?" she cried. "How delightful! Please, Mr. Malet, show me its wonders."

"Look here," said her father to Milman as soon as she had gone. "I couldn't help this. They made things so hard for her that she ran away. She had an idea I was sick and in need of her. She actually earned her passage money. She was waiting at Peekskill for me. Lippsky saw his chance and made the most of it. I had to pay everything. Fortunately I brought all my stuff away. I had two trunks and she had a huge wardrobe affair so we had to take taxis. Honestly, Mr. Milman, I paid the taxi with my last coin. You see me now penniless. She thinks I am staying here overnight and will take an apartment on Central Park tomorrow." He looked appealingly at the two men. "Could I help it?"

"I shouldn't think you'd want to help it with a splendid daughter like that," Bradney answered.

"I didn't mean that. I meant I had to bring her here. She has nothing left. The Barneses are not economical. Here we are, beggars, outcasts in our own city."

"Neither beggars nor outcasts, for three months at least," Peter Milman said cheerfully. "Of course your daughter must remain here. It will be pleasant to have some one young and beautiful with us." He lowered his voice a little. "She must never suspect what brings us all here. It can be supposed that we are engaged in some promotion concerning oil." He put his hand on Barnes's shoulder with a friendly gesture. "I envy you. I am going to see that a room is prepared for her."

BARNES looked at Bradney when the door was closed.

"Outside here," he said, "in the world which calls itself society, Peter Milman has the name of being a soured old grouch and a disgrace to his name. I ask you, if you've ever run across any one more considerate? Lord, Bradney, if you knew the sort of life I've led since that trouble at Saratoga, trying to keep up my end when my people had dropped me and my old pals cut me dead, you'd understand just what this means. I'll go the limit for Peter Milman. You've just seen how he saved me from another humiliation. I should have had to tell my girl that I was such an utter failure I couldn't even get her a room in a cheap hotel."

He stopped short as his daughter came in with Floyd Malet. What a beauty she was, he thought affectionately, and how gracefully she carried herself! There was breeding in every line of her! Then the thought of his financial inadequacies came to him like a dull pain. What had he to offer? Nothing. A few months' respite and a new life would present itself. What would that be? He did not like to think. To live for the day had been his motto.

Nita slipped her arm into that of her tall, handsome father.

"Don't look so glum," she chided brightly. The shock of the Lippsky episode had been forgotten when she entered this unique home. She could associate neither failure nor poverty with any of the men beneath its roof. Bradney had a distinguished appearance, Malet had been most entertaining, and of Peter Milman she had known for years. She was curious to know what had brought them together here. It was difficult to conceive of her father as a successful business man. Lady Horsham had often declared few men had been offered such opportunities and made less of them than Neeland Barnes.

By adroit questioning of the four she learned their secret. They were engaged in promoting a company to operate in the Torrance oil field in southern California.

"How interesting!" she cried. "And of course Mr. Milman is the president?"

"Yes." Neeland Barnes waved his hand airily. "Mr. Bradney is the secretary, Mr. Malet the treasurer."

"And you, Daddy?"

"I am of no importance," he returned. "Just tolerated in a sort of advisory capacity."

"But you're an officer of the company?"

"I suppose you might call me that, but we won't talk of business now."

"Please do," she said. "As it happens I know a lot about oil companies and their way of doing business. You see, my last position in London was as secretary to Sir John Crowhurst, Chairman of the Persian-Bagdad Oil Fields, Limited."

"You?" cried her astonished father.

"Yes. Really, it was tremendous luck, but I was the only girl in the business school who could write equally well in French and English. We had a great many stockholders in Paris. It was rather jolly being Sir John's secretary, for he was one of those quiet, clever men, like Mr. Milman, who deal in millions. I may look like you, Daddy, but I've the business brains of my mother's people."

Milman smiled. "I see we shall have to take you into our confidence later. At present we do not want anything known. In fact, I sent my old butler away and engaged a man who could speak only French so that nothing should leak out. You understand the need of caution?"

"Oh, rather!" said the former secretary of Sir John Crowhurst. "It was because of an overheard conversation that we lost the Bogotan Fields, which are tremendously valuable."

To the four men she seemed an eager, pretty girl who had been by accident near enough to oil to catch a little of its idiom. And they wished they had chosen something else; it might prove embarrassing. Still, they were all in love with her when she bade them good night.

"Come and smoke a good-night cigaret with me presently," she said as she kissed her father. "I'll be looking for you in half an hour."

"Well," said Bradney when she had gone, "for amateurs you did pretty well. I envied you your flights of fancy. Unfortunately I was held down to uninteresting data concerning asphaltum and paraffin bases for heavy oils."

"A woman has not dined in this house for over ten years," said Peter Milman reflectively. "I might have had a daughter of her age now. Barnes, there is another reason for our need to succeed. She must marry well."

WHEN Barnes had lighted a cigaret and was sitting in a big chair in the girl's room he thought there would be many to offer themselves. She had her mother's slim figure and unforgettable eyes added to the vivacity and cheerfulness of the women of his own family.

"Daddy," she said, "if a man who had always been a mechanic and knew nothing about hunting or racing tried to pretend he knew about horses and hounds, how long would it take you to find it out?"

"If he'd answer my questions, not two minutes. Why?"

"What innocent plotters you all were!" she laughed. "Did any of you really think you were deceiving me? Poor old dear, you don't know even the A,B,C's of the thing.

Mr. Bradney was very learned about asphaltum and paraffin bases but that was all he knew."

"What do you know about it?" he demanded.

"I've been living in an atmosphere of petrol—or gasoline as you call it here—for half a year. It fills the air in Europe. Don't you know the next war will be fought for oil control? Don't you realize that every big country has its oil scouts working everywhere? They followed the armies in the war. Have you forgotten England and Roumania and the interest every one is showing in Mesopotamia? People like Sir John Crowhurst who are the heads of oil companies have political affiliations everywhere. How do I know? I wrote all Sir John's private letters, of which he kept carbon copies locked up in his safe. I grew to know as much as an outsider possibly could. That's why it amused me to hear you four prattling away like mechanics talking weights and handicaps to a steward of the Jockey Club."

"My dear Nita," he said, "was it fair to keep pumping us?"

"Why not? I was certain you knew nothing about oil and I wanted to make sure the rest didn't. The only thing I could assume was that they were trying to swindle you. It was horrid to imagine poor Mr. Milman as a swindler."

"Most emphatically he is not!" her father exclaimed.

"Then what about the others: the bearded man who talked about viscosity, and the one who took me into the Japanese garden?"

Neeland Barnes groaned. It was going to be very difficult to put Nita off the scent. She was half Fessendon, and pertinacity was theirs in a large measure. The idea of Bradney and Malet trying to swindle him brought a smile to Barnes's face. Literally he had not one cent in the world.

"Nita," he began earnestly, "I put you on your honor not to repeat to any one what I am going to tell you."

"All right," she said, "agreed. Go on."

"I haven't a nickel in the world. Bradney and Malet have a hundred dollars apiece, maybe a little more. Peter Milman will have to sell this house and its contents in three months. All his money was tied up in International Motors. We are four gentlemen from the chorus of any beggar's opera. It's true we aren't here on any oil promotion business, but we have come together for a very serious matter. We are trying to stage a comeback."

Nita was silent for a moment; it was not easy to readjust herself.

"What sort of a comeback?"

Her father hesitated a moment. "I don't think you'd understand."

"Do you want me to understand?"

"No."

"Then you're ashamed of it!"

"Not a bit. If we put it through it will be the one deed I'd have men remember me by."

"Can I help you?"

"No, Nita. It isn't work for a woman."

"You mean there's danger in it?"

HE WAS afraid he might say too much; dreading to be entrapped by her seemingly innocent questions. She was mentally much quicker than he — the Fessendons again.

"It's not my secret," he returned, "and I ought not to say any more. I can only assure you that Malet and Bradney are splendid fellows, both far superior to me. They believe that what we intend to do is the only right and logical thing. You must let it go at that."

"And because there's danger in it you think I'd better keep out of it?"

"Exactly!" he exclaimed, gratified at this attitude of obedience.

"Then it *is* dangerous," she cried. Barnes saw he had made a damaging admission. "Daddy, what makes you think I'm afraid of anything that's dangerous?"

"Oh, Nita!" he said reproachfully. "That's scarcely playing the game, to drag information from me which is not mine to give. You are deliberately trying to make me betray my friends."

He had risen to his feet; she could see he was not pleased with her.

"Indeed, I'm not," she said earnestly. "Daddy, I came over here because something told me you needed looking after. At Horsham Abbey I used to listen to the things they said about you. Then when I was alone I'd look at your photographs and know they had been telling wicked, malicious lies to prejudice me. I knew what you most needed was some one who loved you. It isn't that I'm trying to make you betray your friends: I want to be sure that they are being honest with you."

"I have never met squarer men," he answered.

"Then I'm on their side too."

Barnes did not know what to say. Like most men of his class he believed that the woman's sphere was far removed from such a venture as that in which he was now engaged. Men might go to the devil as they chose. It was their métier. But his daughter must not be associated with anything irregular. He shook his head.

"I cannot accept your assistance," he told her.

"Very well. I shall tell Mr. Milman I am leaving after luncheon tomorrow. I came over here equipped for a certain sort of position and I'm going to get it."

"Skilled secretarial workers and stenographers are a drug in the market," he warned her.

"I am not going to be a stenographer," she retorted. "I did that to earn money to come here. I shall take the other position so you won't have to live on a stranger's charity."

"That is a hard thing to say," he answered, flushing, "and it's not altogether true. Mr. Milman sought me out because he thought I was able to help him. I am not living on charity. He wants you to stay here as long as I do. It will be very humiliating for me to explain."

"What is it you are trying to do?" she asked.

"You must not expect me to tell you. My dear, don't be hasty and leave us yet. Promise me that?"

"I won't go yet," she said. "I can't lose you as quickly as that."

Tenderly she kissed him good night.

WHEN she was alone her face took on a worried aspect. She had suffered many things in order to be with him and she determined to find out what mystery enveloped this strange household. Although she was not yet twenty-two, she had traveled widely and met innumerable people. In Milman and his associates she recognized men of charm and culture who were, for some reason, holding back from her any mention of their real venture. In order to deceive her they had invented a clumsy falsehood. It could only be because they were plotting something of an illegal nature. Instinctively she knew that her father needed her even if he did not yet know it. The thought that three dangerous men might be plotting some crime for which Neeland Barnes would ultimately bear the blame drove her to action.

Her room was at the rear of the house. Four iron bars protected its windows. Almost five feet below she could see the iron grating which roofed in the garden. The shades had been drawn so that it was only through a chink here and there that she saw that the garden was illuminated. Then she leaned down from her open window she could faintly hear the sound of voices.

It was about her that they were speaking. Barnes had come from her room with the disquieting information that their talk on oil had amused her very much. The news had been a blow.

"Miss Barnes gives me the impression of being a very shrewd young lady," Malet said, "and one not easily deceived. You all know that when once we start it will be almost impossible to keep one who is already a little suspicious in ignorance."

"Yes," said Bradney, "I am afraid she cannot stay here."

"Her godmother lives in Philadelphia," said Barnes. "She can't refuse to take her in for a month or two. She said something about earning her living, but I prefer that she go to Philadelphia."

"I am afraid she would be a source of danger if she remained," Peter Milman agreed, "and it would never do to compromise her in an affair which might end disastrously."

"We've been too busy with theories," said Fleming Bradney when the problem of Nita's welfare had been temporarily settled. "We have discussed a hundred impossible ways of bringing Raxon to terms. I see plainly that we have been accepting current ideas and associations of ideas. What we are after should be original dissociations of ideas."

"I don't get that very clearly," said Neeland Barnes. "As I see it, all we want from Raxon is a cold million. Half of that goes to Milman and we split the rest."

"Exactly," Bradney returned. "That's the very point. How are we to make him give up a million? I don't know. You don't either. Obviously the thing is to get close to him, preferably into his house."

"He doesn't know me," Milman declared, "but I cannot be seen because Loddon is a frequent guest there. The question is, would he recognize Barnes?"

"Certain to," Barnes said gloomily. "I haven't altered much since that day I threw him from the pier. What about Malet?"

"Probably not," said the sculptor. "In those days I was twenty pounds heavier, wore a mustache and had a general air of *bien-être*."

"I am the man," Bradney declared. "I doubt if he has ever seen me. We know he talked to Malet for some time. It is I who must contrive to get into his house."

"In what capacity?" Milman asked.

"There you have me," the scientist admitted. "I wish my mind were more flexible. Simplicity is best in such affairs but simple expedients do not suggest themselves. Instead I find myself laboriously trying to unravel the impossible. I see myself making a forced landing from an airplane in a bed of flowers and being pressed to remain as an honored guest. Excellent, so far as it goes, but I cannot fly and we have no airplane."

"We are safe to start by assuming," Milman cut in, "that Paul Raxon is always cautious. I do not think he would ask the most engaging aviator to remain to luncheon. He would sue him for damaging his flowers. No man who has made enemies as he has can ever feel perfectly safe from retaliatory violence."

Suddenly the listeners were startled at a change they saw on their host's face. Obviously, he was actively alarmed by something. He was leaning forward examining a small instrument on the table before him. They remembered the electric dial, that ingenious device for the protection of his home against invaders.

THE face of the dial was divided into six parts. These numbered sections would tell Milman on what part of the roof the intruder was. The three, pressing about him, saw that a red light suddenly illuminated the square numbered 1. A hand moved very slowly to the square numbered 6.

"That," Milman whispered, looking relieved, "represents the weight. Six pounds means a large and prowling cat."

They heard a sudden exclamation. The weight went up to a hundred and twenty pounds. The square numbered 1 was now in darkness and another was illumined. They could trace the path of the trespasser. He was creeping near them.

"Achille," Milman whispered. "That would be his weight. The six pounds was when he rested a foot on it before putting his whole weight on the grating."

Peter Milman betrayed no nervousness now. Noiselessly he drew a sawed-off shotgun from its hiding-place. Then, with a touch of a button all lights in the garden were extinguished. In the darkness the shades rolled back. Against the sky, bright with stars, the watchers could see a figure lying above their heads. Another light was switched on which left the group below still in darkness but showed pitilessly on the trespasser. The gun was already at Milman's shoulder when Neeland Barnes made a jump and pulled the barrel down.

"My God, Milman!" he cried, white-faced. "It's my girl! It's Nita."

"Ah!" said Milman with a curious smile. "So I perceive. A strange position in which to find a guest, is it not?"

"Inexplicable," said Bradney, looking with suspicion at Barnes.

"I think," Peter Milman went on, "we'd like a little talk with Miss Barnes."

"I'll fetch her," Barnes said eagerly. He was confused, ashamed, humiliated.

"You will be kind enough to remain here," said Milman, covering him with the gun. "I fear that we must insist on an explanation from you, too." He raised his voice a trifle but he did not take his steady gaze from Barnes's face.

"Miss Barnes," he said, "will you be so kind as to come here at once?"

The girl's voice trembled as she answered. It seemed to them all there was a trace of defiance in her tone.

"I won't be a minute. It's not very comfortable up here."

The shades were drawn again and the lights switched on more fully. Neeland Barnes looked from one to another of the men whose faces had been in the shadow. It seemed incredible that they could suspect him of complicity in this eavesdropping.

"Let me explain—" he began

Peter Milman stopped him with a gesture.

"Wait!" he commanded. "We shall hear you when your daughter comes."

Barnes leaned heavily against the wall. He felt that Bradney and Malet looked upon him as a traitor.

They were not obliged to wait many minutes before she came into the garden. Her bearing was confident and unafraid, but there was no hint of the adventuress in it. She came quickly to her father's side and put an arm about his shoulders.

"Oh, Nita, Nita!" he groaned. "How could you do such a dreadful thing as this?"

It seemed strange to the observers that she stood there as though to defend her father from enemies. Of shame or embarrassment there was no sign.

"So you caught me," she said. "Well, perhaps it is best you did."

"Why?" Milman demanded.

"Because I want to take him away from here."

"Again may I ask why?" Milman's gaze was austere but courteous. He wished he could tell whether this was superb acting or only the natural expression of a high-spirited girl.

"Because I came to America to look after him—he had been horribly neglected—and I find him entangled in some network of crime. I made him admit it was something with danger in it. At dinner you all tried to deceive me and would have succeeded if I hadn't happened to know something about oil. You have given him some money which enabled him to get away from that awful hovel he was living in and he's so absurdly grateful he'll do anything to repay you. You want him because of his courage and because he is strong and a good shot and boxes well. He isn't as clever at scheming as you are and I won't have him made use of!"

"Nita, Nita!" groaned her father. "You've got everything wrong."

"I THINK I have misjudged your father," Milman said. "I am very glad to find that what you did was not at his suggestion, but there is much for you to explain. When you came here you were distinctly in the way. I tried to keep that from you; I made you welcome and begged you to remain. You are a guest under my roof and there are certain laws of courtesy and consideration which you should observe. But you have chosen to break them; you have not behaved as I should expect of a gentlewoman of your family. Why?"

"I've told you," Nita cried. "I know you are trying to make my father help you in something desperate and I don't choose to have him run risks for other men."

"You are absolutely wrong," the miserable Barnes asserted.

"Prove it!" she retorted. "You are silent. You dare not tell me the truth. I knew you wouldn't, so I climbed out of the window to listen. I'm not going to make any silly fuss by telling the police. All I want is to take my father away."

"He is free to go," said Peter Milman wearily. He looked at Malet and Bradney. "So are you all. I suppose I did lure you here under false pretenses. In the beginning it seemed so simple."

Nita looked about her in amazement. She did not understand why it seemed they had forgotten her. Even her father turned from her to Peter Milman.

"I shall go only when you have no further use for me," said Bradney.

"When I have done what I promised, I'll go; not before." This from Malet.

"There were no false pretenses," Neeland Barnes cried. "I came willingly and I'll be damned if I go."

"What does it all mean?" the girl whispered. There was no doubting the affection with which the other men regarded Mr. Milman.

"Nita," Barnes said, "with one exception all the bad hurts I've received have been from pals who thought they were acting for my good. You've been dangerously near doing that tonight. You've got everything twisted. You have made me appear in a very poor light among men I respect. You have robbed me of the belief they had in me."

There were tears dimming her violet eyes when she looked at him.

"Oh, Daddy!" she murmured. "I only wanted to help you. When you came to my room I said so, and I meant it."

"Do you mean that if you found your father engaged in doing something the world thought wrong you would take his part?" Milman asked.

"If I thought he was justified, I would."

"Is it fair to involve her?" Bradney broke in.

"Certainly not," Malet decided.

"Perhaps you are right," Milman sighed. "I only know that you might have been a great figure in the world of art, and Mr. Bradney world-famous as a scientist and I myself with a fortune and a home, but for the malevolence of one man."

"Did that man injure my father?" Nita demanded.

"All the ill fortune your father has met comes from this common source."

"Are you sure?" she cried. In all that she had heard of her father's career she had never before heard any one but himself blamed for it.

"I know," said Milman, "that but for a certain man your father would not have been warned off the turf. But for him, too, the clubs would still welcome your father."

"Wait, wait!" Nita begged. "I want to think." She had always defended her father against her aunt's accusations, but she had never been able to dismiss them as entirely fictitious. She had fought because she loved him, not because she believed in his innocence. And now to learn that, after all, his past was not disgraceful filled her with hope and courage. She was ashamed that she had ever doubted him.

"Will you tell me all about it?" she pleaded. "No, Daddy, not you. Let Mr. Milman tell me."

Very concisely he laid before her what he had told the other men of Paul Raxon and his way of life. As she listened she saw clearly that it was owing to the malignity of one man that three lives had been ruined and a fourth brought to a penniless middle age. She listened attentively to the futile plans they had elaborated and rejected. Perhaps to her fresher and more alert mind these plans seemed commonplace and doomed to failure. But she knew it was not to commonplace men she listened.

"Now, Mr. Bradney," she commanded, "tell me your story."

When he had finished she said, "Of course it was Mr. Milman who was the unknown giver of that hundred thousand dollars."

Peter Milman turned red. But he could not deny it.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Bradney asked with reproach in his voice.

"I did not want to influence you. I wanted you to decide for yourself."

She listened to Malet's story and her father's.

"I shall be a great help to you," she said cheerfully when she was in possession of what facts they could give her. "A woman's brains are always useful. You see we so often jump to the right conclusions when you clever men are floundering along in logic."

"At least we have another willing helper," laughed her father. "That makes us a council of five. I'm afraid there are greater difficulties ahead than you know of."

"We haven't one idea worth discussing," Malet admitted.

"I noticed that," she laughed. "I think I see exactly how it can be done."

"Nita!" cried her father. He thought she was making a jest of it.

"I mean it, Daddy," she said earnestly. "Fellow conspirators all, listen!"

PAUL RAXON knew very well that his sudden success would make enemies for him among the established powers in Wall Street, but he also knew that he was not to be brought low by any combination as long as he kept his head and resisted speculation. He was anxious that the truth of Hazen Brewer's suicide should not be widely known. It was not that he had any personal regrets; indeed, he considered it a proof of his power. It was because he had revised his conduct of life. Where formerly he hid behind men and shunned publicity he now desired to build up a reputation that would make him a nationally known figure.

He had purchased a home built for large entertainments and determined to become known as one of America's great hosts. And with this he would erect a reputation for those domestic virtues which count for so much when electioneering. Raxon smiled grimly when he reflected that this meant being on good terms with his wife. And Mrs. Raxon, unaware of his ambitions, was amazed at finding him so reasonably human. She listened with astonishment to advice from one who had hitherto given her only commands.

She was not unaware of her own limitations. The idea that she must with a bound become a gracious hostess to his powerful guests was disquieting. The prospect of upholding the dignity of his name and acting as chatelaine in this immense house terrified her.

"I have here," he said to her one morning, "a list of people with whom I want to establish social relations. At present I don't know a quarter of them except by name."

"Why fill the house with strangers?" she said.

"Because I want something from every name on this list. We've got to entertain so well that they will talk about us. This social racket with me is a means to an end."

Mrs. Raxon had not forgotten the reason she had taken the children to live in Europe. "I suppose you want to fill the house with pretty girls."

"I'm through with that," he said earnestly. "It was a biological phase. I'm out for political power and this is the beginning of a new life, a life that even women voters can't object to. I'm playing a game and if you play it with me you can be a great Washington hostess."

"I don't know anything about being a great hostess," she grumbled.

"You've got to learn. You dress badly and you eat too much. Some of these women who will stay here can teach you how to dress. You can limit your diet. I'm counting on you and the girls to be an asset to me."

Mrs. Raxon was afraid of him. She knew he would not forgive her if she failed and yet she was conscious that she lacked the ability necessary for the part she was to play. It was wise, she thought, to point out her limitations now.

"I don't expect you to catch on to this social end yet. You can hire a well-bred woman to teach you. When you've learned all she can teach, fire her and get another. It's a good system. I've used it a lot. If you really want to learn anything you can learn it. I've got to remodel this place so it doesn't look so much like a summer hotel. I'm a little doubtful of the furniture; Bellington put too much faith in upholsterers. And I'm going to make a nine-hole golf course, a polo ground and a swimming-pool."

She looked again through the names. Among the people listed were some whose activities she had seen described in the social columns for years. Others were equally prominent in politics and finance. The name McKimber headed the list.

"Make the most you can, without overdoing it, of the McKimbers," he commanded. "I want the world to think McKimber and I are bosom friends. Cultivate his wife. Young Robin McKimber is more or less a society type and will be glad to find a polo field here when he comes. Fortunately Bellington had to leave his cellar, so we shan't be dry."

"I wish I understood you better," she said a trifle wistfully. She had not been the only woman to say that.

"I'm glad you don't," he said cryptically. "That prevents your giving me away. I'm one of those men whose peculiar joy it is to play a lone hand. If you share secrets they are only fifty per cent your own."

She was vastly relieved that she had confessed her ineptitudes. She could go more cheerfully about her tasks now. She would summon the courage to dismiss impudent servants. She had a vision of spotless kitchens, gleaming brass and the latest features in domestic science. Behind her there were instincts of thrift and household pride not wholly obliterated by her recent mode of life. She wondered why the McKimbers were so important in Paul's eyes. Other names exceeded them far in the social scale as she apprehended it. That he had been chairman of the National Committee of her husband's party meant nothing to Mrs. Raxon.

The idea of hiring a well-bred woman returned to her when she thought of her sneering butler. How superior he seemed; how aware of her social deficiencies! Yet she lacked the courage to dismiss him. She opened her mouth as though to frame a sentence which would annihilate him, and her courage failed. Distinctly there was something to be said for the well-bred woman. Such a one would know how to deal with butlers.

"A Miss Brown to see you, madam," said the butler. He presented a card on a silver tray. Under Miss Brown's name was penciled: "I am calling at the suggestion of Mrs. Hamilton Buxton."

ALTHOUGH Mrs. Raxon had not been in her native land for some years, she knew Mrs. Buxton's name very well as that of a distinguished member of the smart hunting set. She would see Miss Agatha Brown and buy a set of books or give her a subscription. This would please Mrs. Hamilton Buxton and Paul.

Miss Brown was hardly Mrs. Raxon's idea of a book agent or one in need of subscriptions. She was young, pretty and delightfully well dressed—doubtless one of Mrs. Buxton's personal friends.

"Mrs. Buxton," Miss Brown began, "thought that since you had bought this wonderful place and would entertain a lot you might need a social secretary. I was going to her but she has taken Lord Kitemanor's hunting box in Leicestershire for the coming season. I have just come back to the United States, where I belong, after spending some years abroad."

"You speak French, then," said Mrs. Raxon in the Gallic tongue. It was her one accomplishment.

"Yes," said Miss Brown, and added with still greater fluency: "I can tell you have been living in Belgium. Belgian French is unmistakable, isn't it?" She smiled graciously. "I have been mainly in England, though. My last position was with the Countess of Horsham at Horsham Abbey. She was one of the Boston Fessendons, as of course you know."

"What did you do there?" Mrs. Raxon asked.

"Literally everything," Miss Brown confided. "It is an immense place, fully twice the size of this, and for three years I managed it from cellar to attic. I wrote the menus, engaged the servants, saw they did their work and dismissed them if they did not."

Mrs. Raxon smiled happily.

"You understand," Miss Brown continued, "that I was not a servant or even a housekeeper. I'm a great believer in social distinctions. They make entertaining so much easier, don't they? Most people think I am a guest like themselves. I have even been with royalty."

Miss Brown brought out some snapshots.

"This is the west front of the Abbey," she exclaimed. Mrs. Raxon saw that Miss Brown was in a very smartly cut riding suit. "That man next to me," Miss Brown explained, "is the Duke of Arlington. His daughter, Lady Rhona Kenwithen, is on my other side."

"Her arm is in yours," said Mrs. Raxon.

"Yes," said Miss Brown. "She was very fond of me."

"How old are you?" Mrs. Raxon asked.

"Twenty-six."

"You don't look it."

"No sensible woman looks her age today. That group was taken some years ago."

With modesty Miss Brown, in the course of half an hour, managed to impress Mrs. Raxon most favorably. This was the Heaven-sent woman who was twenty-six, and stern with servants, and yet contrived to look eighteen.

"You would find very little to do here at first," said the older woman. "We have no house-guests at present, but we shall entertain a great deal later."

"I should find a very great deal to do at once," said Miss Brown emphatically. "To begin with I should dismiss your butler, who is impertinent and offensive."

Impulsively Mrs. Raxon leaned forward and kissed Miss Brown.

"Dearie," she said, "I need you at once."

"Good!" said Miss Brown without excessive gratitude. "Another thing: If I stay I mustn't be hampered in engaging or dismissing servants. It must be understood that I have complete charge of the household arrangements. I cannot possibly run this establishment smoothly if I am to have the help running to you with complaints."

"That's exactly what I want," Mrs. Raxon said enthusiastically.

MRS. RAXON sought out her husband and told him the news.

"Fine," he said. "Any one recommended by Mrs. Buxton will be all right. I suppose you looked over her testimonials?"

"Of course," said his wife, conscious that she had forgotten all about it and was not anxious for him to find it out.

"What are you paying her?"

Another poser for Mrs. Raxon. But she made the best of it.

"You told me I was to have complete charge, Paul, and I'm not going to give you the chance of calling me down for extravagance. You'll like her. She's so distinguished. I don't think she approved of the drawing-room furniture."

"We shall agree on that. Bellington furnished it like an hotel reception room. One thing more that I forgot to tell you before. If any one asks you if I have political aspirations, say no. This goes particularly with the McKimbers. You and I know it and that's enough for the present."

At a square house on lower Fifth Avenue the young lady who had just passed as Agatha Brown burst in upon four anxious men.

"My dears," she cried, "I've got it! I move in tomorrow and take complete charge of the household arrangements. I carried her off her feet. She kissed me and called me 'dearie.' I left before she could ask to see my testimonials. I'm afraid I lied fearfully. It's quite true, Uncle Peter, they are going to entertain on a large scale. She showed me the list. She evidently doesn't know how to do things at all. I didn't see Mr. Raxon. She told me he was laying out a nine-hole golf course and a polo field and all sorts of improvements."

Neeland Barnes looked at her with pride.

"Now you are there," said Peter Milman, "what good shall we be to you?"

"I've thought it all out. You will have to stop here because Loddon knows you. I shall need the rest of you at once, though."

"What possible use can you have of me?" Bradney demanded eagerly.

"Or of me?" said Barnes.

"All in good time," she laughed. "Uncle Peter, you made a great mistake in letting Sneed go. I am dismissing the Raxon butler tomorrow and shall want another."

"You mean you will put Sneed in? Wonderful! I have his address."

"Won't Loddon remember him?" Bradney asked.

"Probably. Sneed will say that he left because he couldn't stand the place any longer. I'm afraid he will have to pretend to be disloyal. We shall have to let him in on part of our plan. Do you think he can be trusted?"

"Without a doubt," said Peter Milman. "Yes, I made a mistake in letting Sneed go."

"But what am I to do?" her father persisted.

"You and Professor Bradney will be my imported footmen."

Instinctively Neeland Barnes stroked his chestnut mustache.

"I've had it since I was a freshman at Yale," he said regretfully.

"And I've had this," Bradney stroked his beard, "ever since I went to Göttingen for my Ph.D. How I shall look without it, I dare not even think. But I cannot possibly do what you suggest. Don't footmen have to wear some sort of gorgeous livery?"

"Undress livery at Great Rock," she said.

"The poor old thing has lost his nerve," Neeland Barnes laughed. "He can toy with atomic disintegration but he shies at pouring out wine and passing plates."

"Can you do it?" Bradney retorted.

"It will be a great jest. I shall enjoy every minute of it. I used to be fair at amateur theatricals and this will be the best part I was ever cast for. Man, if you have any sporting blood in you, you can't hold back! If you have your nerve with you we'll make a great pair. If you back out I shall have to find a professional manservant for a running mate."

"It isn't lack of nerve," Bradney explained. "I simply don't know the technique of it."

NEELAND BARNES was in his element. He explained lucidly the whole duty of footmen in fashionable houses.

"Sneed will be there," Nita reminded him. "I'm banking on him. He will be nominally your superior, and help you in any way he can. It won't be a bit difficult, Uncle Fleming. Sneed, Daddy, and I shall be there."

"Where do I come in?" Malet asked.

"I have a very definite use for you, Uncle Floyd. I talked a great deal with Mrs. Raxon about her husband. He suspects the furniture, and he is right. She thinks he is a genius but admitted that he wants advice on period furniture. Uncle Floyd, how well do you speak French?"

"As well as I do English. Ten years in Paris and no chance to forget it because I've been teaching it as a side line in Philadeplhia for the last six or seven years. Why?"

"I'm going to invite you to stay at the Raxons' as soon as you can raise a little moustache and imperial. You shall be a French viscount, a friend of Lady Horsham's. You are a great authority on French furniture. That means you must study all the books you can get hold of. I'll arrange a suitable name for you later."

"How about my testimonials?" Bradney said, suddenly coming from a trail of fancies in which he saw himself the perfect footman.

"I engage all help. Your testimonials will be perfectly satisfactory. The Raxon woman is afraid of menservants. I could see her quail at her butler's insolence. She won't interfere. Her husband has given her full charge and she has deputed me to do it for her. I think she needs a friend. She babbled most indiscreetly to me about the people she hoped to have as guests. Apparently she knows none of them."

"Do you remember if the name McKimber was on the list?" Milman asked.

"Yes, it was the first name on it."

Milman smiled. Evidently the news gratified him.

"Another of Loddon's port-begotten confidences. John McKimber is aiming at the Senate and hopes New York State will send him to Washington. At present there seems no serious opposition. I could hardly believe Loddon at the time, but he insisted there was a dark horse from New York City who would beat McKimber. I see now he was hinting plainly at Raxon."

"But Raxon isn't known politically," Barnes remarked.

"That does not make his candidacy impossible. Men have often ridden into high office on waves of public hysteria." Milman's eyes were bright. He believed that Loddon had been right after all when he hinted that a dark horse would go to the Senate from New York. But how could a decent man like McKimber, extremely wealthy, a large employer of labor and a great power up-state be defeated if fair methods alone were used?

"I think I am right in assuming that Paul Raxon has definite political ambitions. He must remove McKimber from the running to get his chance. I think McKimber is in danger. His relations with Raxon—if he stays there—must be observed very closely."

"That can be managed," said Nita calmly.

"I should like frequent reports," Milman said.

"Footmen, butlers, social secretaries and furniture experts on their nights out shall keep you informed," she, returned. "I start under the most favorable conditions. Mrs. Raxon had to beg me to come and she will not worry me at all. You see she doesn't know how a big place is run, and I do."

IT WAS a joyous company of adventurers that night. In the butler's pantry Neeland Barnes was lecturing—with suitable demonstrations—on the care of glass and silver. Fleming Bradney, one of the world's great authorities on etheric physics was listening intently and making copious notes. Barnes had rarely been so gratified at a listener's attention.

Floyd Malet in the library had before him "Histoire de l'art l'antiquité," Lady Dilke's work on French furniture and photographs of the *Bureau de Roi* in the Louvre.

Unheard, Peter Milman and Nita came to the pantry. It was Achille's night out.

"Never, never," they heard Barnes say, "put good cut-glass into boiling water. Lukewarm and plenty of soap. Table glass must be crystal clear."

"You have only to tell me once," the man of science returned. "My memory has always been good and my laboratory training has made me meticulously careful. Damn!" he cried. "The thing cracked for no visible reason."

"Rot!" said the pseudo footman. "How could that be? You knocked it against the side of the bowl."

"Nothing of the sort!" said Bradney heatedly. "You know nothing whatever of glass. You couldn't even define it. It is probably news to you that glass is a quickly solidified solution in which silica, silicates, borates, phosphates and aluminates may be either solvents or solutes, and metallic oxides may be held, either in solution or in suspension."

"Good Lord!" Barnes cried. "If you tell that to the chef at Great Rock, or let it loose on old Sneed, nothing can save you. Glass to me is just shiny stuff that you can't wash without leaving smears on it."

Bradney laughed. "Forgive me, 'Enry, I will try. I shall need a new rag for every glass I dry. Washing is simple. Drying seems the difficult part."

"Get the female servants to do it for you," Barnes suggested. "You will be too ornamental to waste yourself on this alone. Of course you understand that all tall, unmarried footmen have to devote themselves to the women help? You must expect to be fallen in love with constantly."

In Bradney's agitation another glass cracked.

"I had never thought of that," he muttered. "You must chaperon me. I have no small talk."

"Take 'em to the pictures and hold their hands. Quite simple," Barnes told him. "I have an idea that without my moustache I shall be a criminal type. What do you think?"

"I quite agree with you," Bradney retorted. "It will be a great shock to your daughter."

"The fun begins when *you* take your beard off," Barnes jeered.

Bradney harked back to the matter of female help. The idea agitated him.

Then Nita came to his rescue.

"Don't let Daddy tease you," she said. "I'm going to engage Swedish women and they are very clannish. You'll be left alone and I shall tell Sneed to look after you."

NITA BARNES fitted into the life at Great Rock very quickly. She would have trouble later on, she decided, with the three Raxon girls whose ages ranged from twelve to eighteen years. They were attractive in a rather second-rate way. The eldest girl was bitterly opposed to letting Agatha Brown mingle with the guests, realizing that the secretary's personality would make her the more attractive of the two. Since Miss Brown carried the day, however, and appeared at the table admirably gowned, the Raxon girls determined to force her out.

Paul Raxon, walking leisurely up his drive one day was amazed to see two strapping men alight from a taxi outside the house and carry suitcases in as though they had come to stay. As they had gone to the back entrance he supposed they were menservants, hired by the social secretary. It had not, until this moment, occurred to him that to have strange men in the house might be dangerous. There was a new butler expected. That made three. Suspicious and crafty, Raxon saw that he might have three spies here for all he knew.

Neeland Barnes, looking fifteen years younger without his big mustache, was giving his fellow footman a few last words of advice when a blasé, cynical man pushed open the door of their common sitting-room. Never before had Fleming Bradney seen the man who had disgraced him. In a sense the sight of Raxon was a shock. He seemed refined, intelligent and of a superior type. But Barnes was a better judge of mankind. He saw in Raxon a cruel and vindictive nature.

" 'Allo, 'andsome," said Barnes genially. "Your name Sneed?"

"It is not," said Raxon frowning. "Who are you?"

"My name is 'Iggins," said Barnes. "When you know me well enough you can call me 'Enry. I'm the new first footman. This"—he pointed to Bradney, whose beardless face had a certain childish wistfulness about it—"this is Alfred Budd, also a footman to the swell who owns this place. Alf don't say much. I call him the dumb waiter. If you aren't Sneed, who are you?"

"I happen to be 'the swell who owns this place,' " said Raxon. He had no doubt about the bona-fides of these men. Tall London footmen by the look of them. Henry's agitation amused him. He was heard to say that his last employer, Lord Richester, would not so demean himself as to enter his footman's room.

Raxon left them, as he supposed, wrapped in embarrassment.

"I have seen the footmen," he said to his wife. "They'll do. Let me be told when the new butler comes."

"He's here," said Mrs. Raxon. "I hope he's satisfactory. He has the best references. He was with Mr. Peter Milman for years."

A few minutes later Sneed bowed respectfully.

"Why did you leave Mr. Milman?" Raxon asked.

There was a certain reticence about the man.

"Mr. Milman was very good to me," he began, "but of late it got to be very hard there, sir."

"In what way?"

"I'm afraid poor Mr. Peter is losing his mind. He's had some money losses, I understand, sir, and he's acting queer. It's my belief he's dangerous. He's cut down on the food so there isn't enough to eat. He's been a good employer to me but when a man don't get his wages or his meals he has to look out for himself."

"Quite right. I've seen your two new footmen. One of them—'Enry he calls himself—seems inclined to be impudent. Check that."

"Impudent!" Sneed was incredulous. "Why, Mr. Raxon, they have the highest references. They've been accustomed to only first-class houses."

Raxon explained; Sneed's face cleared.

"They didn't expect the master of the house would come in. On duty, sir, you'll find no fault with them. I don't know what's come over house servants of late, Mr. Raxon. When off duty they seem to think themselves as good as any one else."

Raxon said nothing and dismissed him with a nod. He was satisfied that Miss Agatha Brown knew her job. She had brought in three excellent men and the colony of Swedish women seemed thoroughly capable. Of the new French chef great things were promised. Raxon was a small eater but he knew that a host is judged more by his table than by the virtues of his heart.

He found himself wondering how it was that so much intelligence, energy and beauty could be united in a girl who was now only one of his help. It had been Paul Raxon's idea to make a hit with her by his knowledge of furniture. He had flung open the door of a lofty apartment with the simple exclamation, "My *Louis Seize* room."

"What makes you think so?" Miss Brown returned after one brief glance. She went from piece to piece, criticizing here and there until his pride of possession fled. "I know very little about French furniture," she said simply. "When I was at Horsham Abbey, Viscount Raoul de Guillain often stayed there. You know, of course, that he is a great authority. Oddly enough, I hear he is in New York. If you would like him to see your things I'm sure he'd be delighted. If you've many people coming next week it might be better to weed out some of these. People—American women especially—are getting so clever about period furniture, don't you think? One hates to be laughed at in that sort of thing."

"I suppose this viscount has a regular fee?"

"He would want to fight a duel with you if you even suggested it. He is quite a rich man—all the De Guillains are well-off—and often gives his services to museums to detect forgeries."

"I wonder how I could get hold of him?"

"I'm almost sure he would accept an invitation to dine if I reminded him about Horsham Abbey. Shall I write?"

"I'll tell you what we'll do," Raxon said. "Give me a letter of introduction and I'll call tomorrow when I shall be in New York. Find out where he is staying and let me know."

RAXON was delighted with the chance of having an expert decide what of the stuff he had purchased from Bellington was genuine.

A few hours later, Viscount Raoul de Guillain, duly warned by a telegram in French, dispatched from a distant office, moved into the Ritz.

He received Paul Raxon with reserve. It was only when he learned that Miss Agatha Brown was a guest at Great Rock that he consented to go. He was affable enough to agree to stay there a week.

When he arrived the admirable Sneed was in the hall and a footman immediately carried his luggage to his room.

"The whole gang's here now," said 'Enry, wringing his hand. "How's good old Peter?"

"More hopeful than ever." Malet seemed a trifle nervous. He fingered his small mustache and imperial in doubt. "Do you think I can carry this through? If one is suspected all are suspected."

"Of course you can. Even Alf is getting a firm touch. He had stage fright at his first dinner but he's coming on splendidly. He says the chemistry of cooking has never been discussed by a mind of the first order. He and the chef are great pals. Nita runs the place like clockwork. She's a wonder."

"Are they easy people to get along with?"

"Yes. Too new at the entertaining game to be sure of themselves. If you want food or drink, I'm yours to command." 'Enry sat in the most comfortable chair he could find and lit a cigaret. "What's the mystery about McKimber?"

"Is he here yet?"

"He comes tomorrow with wife and son. The eldest Raxon girl is highly excited. What is there about McKimber that makes old Peter so anxious to know his every move?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Peter says I'm under Nita's orders and she will tell us what to do."

"You're all right; you're a guest," 'Enry remarked. "I'm only a poor, honest footman and have to be ordered around. Those Raxon girls are the worst; it makes Sneed furious. Not that I mind; I look on this as my best rôle. I shall come here when I want a quiet smoke."

"You've not had any run-in with Raxon?"

"Not exactly, but he's a sneering swine. Told Bradney and me only this morning that menservants were merely parasitic growths. I had the hardest work to keep Alf—that's Bradney—from asking him to define parasitic growths. Raxon said that only timidity drove husky men like Alf and me into domestic service. I hope there's a time coming when he'll think differently."

"Milman wants you to familiarize yourself with Raxon's private rooms. From an interview in a New York paper it appears that he lives in a tower."

"He does. Since I've been here not even his wife has ventured into it. I go in regularly to carry cedar logs for his open fire. The doors are fitted with special locks. I've taken an impression of the keys. Alf goes to town tomorrow. He'll fetch them. I'm not worrying; Nita and Peter are running this show. Raxon expects a great deal from you, for he says you are the only expert he ever got for nothing."

MRS. McKIMBER, whose fortune had enabled her husband to become one of the wealthiest men in a wealthy state, enjoyed staying in new houses and meeting new sets of people. She saw in this invitation to Great Rock the opportunity for discussion of reduction of weight to music, fruit diet and the gospel of calories. On each of these points Mrs. McKimber had her experiences to relate.

Her son Robin, a good-looking man of five-and-twenty, did not welcome new friends unless he knew all about them and that knowledge proved satisfactory. On the drive from the hotel in New York where the McKimbers always stayed he kept questioning his father about the Raxons. Why should his father waste a week here when he could be touring the state and strengthening his political position?

What Robin had read recently in the papers had not interested him in Paul Raxon. It seemed, from the accounts, that Raxon was the only American of wealth and position who was an expert on architecture. His aim was to make the United States the home of magnificent buildings. To Robin's way of thinking Raxon was a crank who had luckily made a great deal of money and had hired a good press agent.

Although Raxon had planned that McKimber should visit him, the manufacturer had no knowledge of it. McKimber, on his way to Great Rock, felt humiliated with the knowledge that he had virtually asked for an invitation here. A few months before such a thing would have seemed impossible. He had learned suddenly that Paul Raxon was working to gain a primary nomination for the exalted position which McKimber believed to be already in his own grasp. At first he laughed the idea to scorn. But his campaign manager had shown him innumerable clippings filled with interviews in which Paul Raxon had spoken enthusiastically about beautifying American cities so that the Old World would send her tourists to see them. Raxon had addressed a federation of women's clubs and had been very well received.

"He's got a peach of a press agent," said McKimber's campaign manager gloomily, "and his line is absolutely new. It's making a great hit with the influential women."

"He can't win on that stuff," McKimber growled. He was one of those old-time politicians who distrust women and underestimate their power.

"Maybe not, but he can split the party vote can't he? His platform is a winner. He promises the building trades plenty of work and he has been their man for twenty years. As I've said, the women will vote for him and so will the intellectuals. I tell you, John, he's got to be stopped. If he runs, our party loses out. That's sure."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"Nobody seems to know. You've got to get under his skin. No good going to his office. In another man's office the cards are stacked against you. Try the social end of it. He's just bought Bellington's place and is going to entertain. I've got it. I know Herman Loddon pretty well. I'll work it so he asks you for a week-end. How about it?"

IN THE end McKimber agreed this was the best plan. Eventually he, Mrs. McKimber and their son were invited for a week. McKimber did not look forward to his task; but he did not doubt his success. He was used to dealing with men and he would have little trouble with a dreamer with a better-architecture complex.

Robin refused to be one of the party. He agreed to drive his parents to Great Rock, where they would make his excuses. He was forced to admire the beauty of the estate as he drove along its winding roads. It far exceeded anything he had ever imagined. There was even a polo field and golf links. But it was neither Great Rock nor a glimpse of polo field or putting-green which influenced him to change his mind. Just for a few seconds as the heavy car swung around a curve Robin McKimber had looked into the amethyst eyes of a lovely girl. He had looked into many eyes, but these were different, baffling, alluring, inviting, repelling. He had barely time to see she was tall and slim and golden-haired.

"I hear," said his mother in her placid voice, "that the eldest Raxon girl is good looking."

"Good looking!" he said indignantly. "She's a peach!"

"When did you see her?" Mrs. McKimber looked at him curiously.

"I mean I've heard she's a peach," he explained.

McKimber sighed and spoke for the first time for some miles.

"You nearly ran us off the road a while ago," he said. "There was a drop of thirty feet at that point. I want to go to Washington; I don't want to end up here."

"I must have the wheel tightened," Robin answered. He hoped he was not flushing. He had thought himself to be above such displays of emotion. But then he had never seen such a girl before. Until now he had believed that writers who described heroines' eyes as violet or amethyst were lying. He knew now he had misjudged them. They, too, must have seen the eldest Raxon girl.

It took Robin's utmost composure to keep his face becomingly wreathed in smiles when he was introduced to the Misses Raxon. They were nothing; usual types, overdressed and badly made up. When they suggested he might like to see the estate he agreed readily, so readily that the eldest girl dismissed her sisters with a gesture—as the eldest she was to have first chance.

Robin saw the golden girl as he crossed the golf links.

"One of your house guests?" he asked, as he hoped, without apparent interest.

"That's Miss Brown," said the Raxon girl. "No, she isn't a guest."

"A neighbor, perhaps?"

The eldest Miss Raxon laughed maliciously.

"She's a sort of housekeeper-secretary. Mother and we girls haven't time to think about ordering meals or firing servants so we hired her."

Miss Brown had a mashie and was practicing short approaches.

"Of all the nerve!" said Gertrude Raxon. "I'll see mother stops that. She can't learn how to play golf here."

Robin watched Miss Brown swing. The ball cleared three pine trees and nestled within putting distance of the hole: as pretty a stroke as he, a scratch man, could ever hope to make.

"I imagine she has learned a good bit of golf somewhere else," he said dryly. Gertrude Raxon became more and more distasteful to him. She was an empty-headed little flirt and could not interest him. As soon as he could he went back to his room.

HIS reward came at dinner. Miss Brown was there, quiet, well dressed. They were not introduced and she sat at some distance from him. Robin determined to get an introduction after dinner.

After dinner came a dance and it became increasingly difficult to evade the two elder Raxon girls. Robin looked sourly at an animated and gesticulating Frenchman—a viscount as he recalled it—who carried on a long conversation in his native tongue with Miss Brown. Only once Robin stared into the girl's violet eyes; they seemed to look through him. He was sure Miss Brown remembered that moment when they first saw each other. So she was a sort of housekeeper-secretary. He understood now the perfect service, the tall footman, and the butler who had an air with him.

Finally poor Robin had to introduce himself. He did it very well. It came in the nature of an apology. Robin was so good-looking that most girls forgave his minor breaches of etiquette.

"My name is Robin McKimber," he began, "and as I know you are Miss Brown we are introduced, aren't we?"

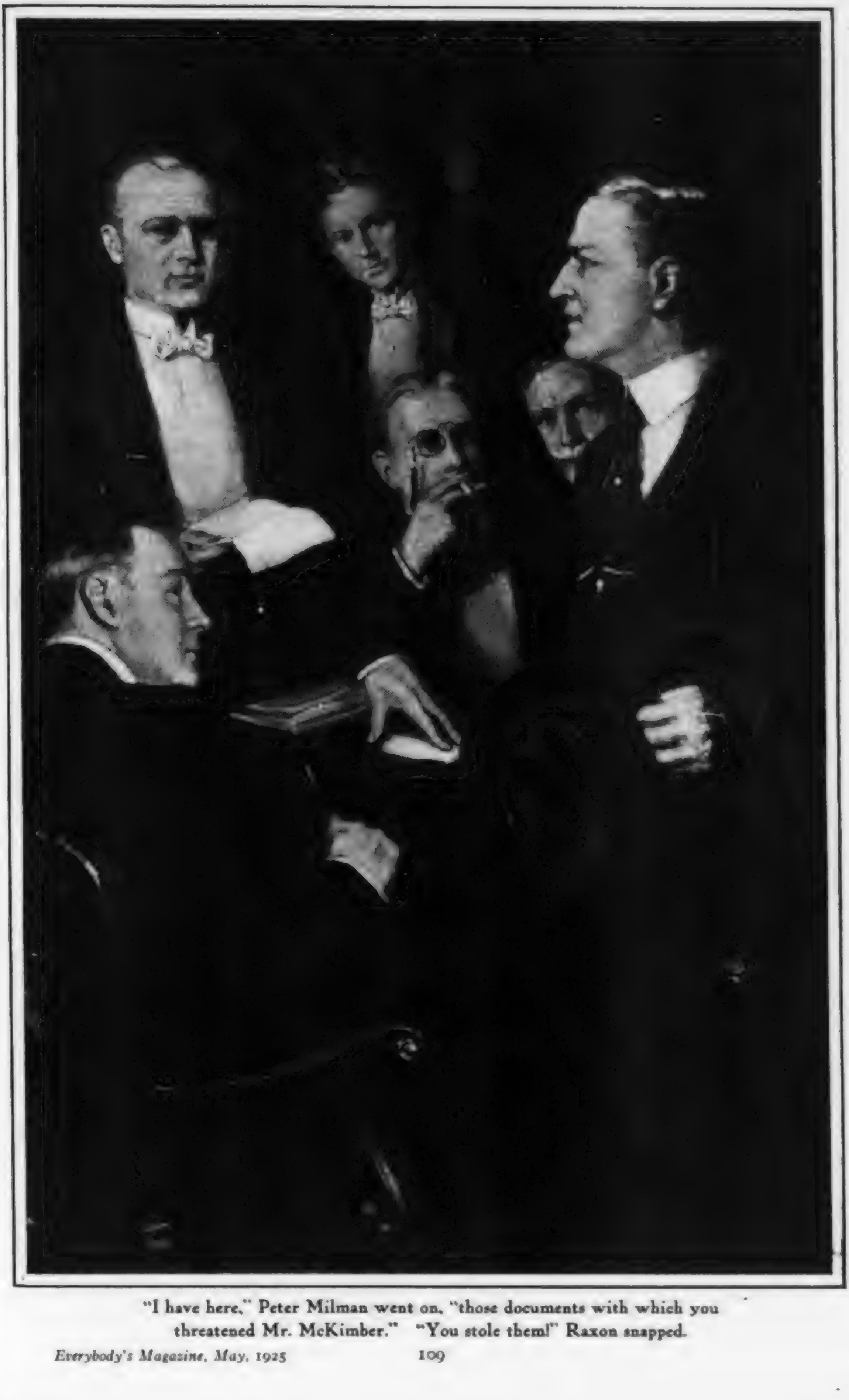
"And this is your idea of an introduction?" Miss Brown spoke without enthusiasm. He was a little staggered; most people found his smile infectious.

"I had to introduce myself," he returned, "because no one else would."

"Exactly what was the necessity?" she demanded.

"I wanted to apologize for nearly running you down on the drive this afternoon." She was not making it easy.

"I'm afraid you exaggerate," she said



"I have here," Peter Milman went on, "those documents with which you threatened Mr. McKimber." "You stole them!" Raxon snapped.

calmly. "I was standing on a rock fully two feet above the road level when you turned the corner so recklessly." His face fell. She could not help smiling a little. "But of course if you really do want to apologize for being so careless—"

"I do!" he said earnestly.

"Then you must apologize to your parents. They were in real danger and I was not."

"A heavy car like mine would have carried you clear off the road, stone or no stone," he insisted.

"Knowing that, you ought to be more careful."

"I'm a most careful driver," he said. "Ask my mother. What happened today never happened to me before."

"What was that?" A trace of a smile passed over her face and was gone.

"I saw that eyes could really be violet," he answered, looking into them admiringly, "and I forgot everything."

"You should lose your license," she said severely. But there was no doubt that she smiled as she turned away.

Robin's evening was spoiled. The French nobleman returned to his animated conversation. No other opportunity occurred for Robin to speak to her again. He was presently asked to join his father and Raxon in a game of bridge.

John McKimber was no less puzzled than was his son concerning Paul Raxon. He had known of Raxon for years, but he had never met him nor believed very much in his influence. McKimber had thought of him as a younger man who would look up to him as one having long ago won his spurs. McKimber had come here sure that victory would be his in the ultimate struggle.

He was uncomfortably aware that Raxon was not easily impressed. A worldly cynicism was reflected in his speech. Phrases which had been sonorous friends of McKimber for years brought only a smile to Raxon's face, once or twice McKimber believed his host was laughing at him. The younger man's knowledge of politics and politicians seemed uncanny. He was without reverence for the dead or respect for the living. It would not be advisable to start any serious discussion until the two were on more friendly terms.

Raxon's would not be the first political aspirations that McKimber had nipped in the bud. That was the duty of all sound machine politicians, or popular government might creep in and destroy the machinery. Raxon would see he was wrong to imperil his party because of his newborn ambitions. For almost a generation now John McKimber had been the mainstay of his party in his own section of the state. If honors were to be awarded, it was to him they should come. Raxon would probably see it in that light. If he did not, there would be summoned the big men who must be obeyed.

RAXON occupied two big rooms in a tower which afforded an uninterrupted view of the Sound. One of the rooms was a library, deep-paneled and splendid; the other was his bedroom and bath. To this retreat none came but the servants. Here he dreamed of power and planned the new life. None could overhear what he would say to McKimber when the hour came to which he had long looked forward.

Life had been very good to Paul Raxon. He had always won. For the moment he had no doubts, no apprehensions or annoyances.

His wife's secretary ran everything perfectly. Raxon liked the tall, well-mannered footmen. There was a cockney alertness about the blond one which amused him and he had an amazing knowledge of vintages and cigars acquired among noble and lavish families in England. And the girl, Agatha, was lovely. As he looked at her sometimes he wondered if the old fires were really extinguished. Until he was firmly set in Washington he must walk warily. How much shrewder he was than McKimber, who would not bow to the power of the woman voter! He was condescending when he should be deferential.

They were walking back from golf one day when McKimber broached the subject that filled their minds.

"When can we have a talk?" McKimber said abruptly.

"What are we doing now?"

"You know what I mean. You know that I've a deal to say to you that mustn't be overheard."

"Why should I know it?" Raxon inquired. "And who would want to listen?"

"Well, I'm going to let you into our confidence and you know that strangers shouldn't hear it."

"Whose confidence?" Raxon retorted.

"The party's confidence. It's a big thing, Raxon."

When he answered, Raxon's manner had no hint of sarcasm in it but McKimber knew that he was laughing at him.

"Tomorrow night the young people are having a dance. I keep late hours. What about midnight? You have never yet been in my tower study, have you? Sneed shall bring you up there at twelve."

McKimber felt himself dismissed. He frowned as he glanced at the smaller man. The interview in the tower room would need careful handling. He wondered if he had underestimated Raxon.

WHEN Robin joined him, McKimber was still fuming. Unwisely he told his son of the coming interview but not of its nature. Still more unwisely, Robin, by this time head and ears in love with Agatha Brown, confided to her the news. She had always seemed ready to chat about his parents.

"I don't understand it at all," said Robin. "Father came here for some purpose that I haven't yet caught on to, but it must be of a political nature. Tomorrow night up in Raxon's tower room father is going to lay down the law. Just because Raxon made a lot of money doesn't say he is fit to represent New York at Washington. I think father pays entirely too much attention to Raxon's claims. He couldn't get in possibly. What do you think?"

"That politics are very dull."

"They won't bother us," he said tenderly. "We won't know they exist, Agatha. I shall be looking in your eyes and forgetting time and space."

"That will make you a very agreeable dancing partner," she laughed. She sighed a little. "I'm sorry, Robin, but we won't be dancing together tomorrow evening. It is my night off and I'm going to see some friends in New York."

"I'll come with you," he said eagerly. "Do let me drive you in."

"That would never do. I should be dismissed when I returned. No, you must stay here and dance with the Raxon girls and their friends. Don't you realize how much you've neglected them?"

"I didn't come here to dance with them," he retorted. "I came here because father has something to tell Raxon from the National Committee; I stayed because I saw you. If I've neglected the Raxon girls it is absolutely your fault. They should blame you for it."

"They do," she answered. "Mrs. Raxon, who was my friend, is growing cold. I shall not be here long."

"Then marry me and get a lifelong job. You'll like it, sweetheart. I'm not half good enough for you, but day by day you'll learn to love me more and more."

"Is this a proposal?" she laughed.

"It's the first I've made since lunch," he returned.

"And I shall give you my usual answer. I like you, Robin; you are one of the most attractive people I have ever met. I think it would not be hard to be absolutely crazy about you."

"How soon can you start?"

"I'm afraid I never can, Robin. You know nothing at all about me. If I told you I had certain definite aims to accomplish you wouldn't understand what I meant and I couldn't possibly explain."

"All sensible girls have definite aims," he said. "Why make difficulties about that?"

"Your father wouldn't permit it. I've watched him, Robin, when you've been dancing or talking to me. Do you suppose it was just idly that he told me last night he had a great future planned for you?"

"He often says that," Robin answered. "That's why he wants to go to Washington. He's thinking of politics and diplomacy."

"He was thinking of the sort of woman he wants you to marry. I can't blame him; he feels he is fighting for you against a woman who may be a common adventuress for all he knows. On the whole I rather like your father."

"The old man's all right," Robin said calmly, "and I probably respect him more than any one else does, but I'm no Chinese ancestor worshiper. I shall choose my own wife. If he objects, the loss is his."

"You'd starve, my bold and brave Robin."

"Not on your life, Amethysta. I'm no idle society boy, although I play society games. I've an interest in the works which I earned. He'd have to buy me out and it would be cheaper to have me remain. And I control some basic patents that he uses—I invented them, if you can believe it."

"How clever of you!" she cried. "Do

you know, I had no idea you ever worked. You play so well, you see."

"Do I?" he said, a touch of depression in his manner. "Well, work and play haven't gained me much if you always keep me at a distance. You talk a lot more to that French count than you do to me."

"He is cleverer, frowning Robin, and I have known him longer."

"Amethysta," he said earnestly, "there isn't such an awful lot of happiness in this world: why do you want to rob me of my chance of it?"

"If there was anything I could do to make you happy I would do it if I had myself only to think about."

She left him with a smile. It was not easy to respond to it. So far in life young McKimber had obtained what he wanted. He realized that he had never wanted anything very strongly until now, when he met his first serious defeat.

Inside the house Agatha Brown met 'Enry, that distinguished judge of vintage wines and Havana cigars.

"You allow that McKimber boy to monopolize too much of your time," he grumbled. "The McKimbers are absolutely without social weight."

"In so many words that is what Mr. McKimber told Robin about social secretaries. Don't talk about him now. I've got to go into New York and see Uncle Peter."

"Anything developed?" he demanded eagerly.

"Yes. At midnight tomorrow—there's a dance here, you remember — Mr. McKimber is going to see Mr. Raxon and tell him he has no chance politically."

"How do you know that?"

"Robin told me."

"So you are pumping him! Clever girl. That's why you are letting him waste his time."

"It's not being clever," she returned, flushing; "it's being dishonorable. I'm not pumping him—I'm letting him talk and that's almost as bad."

"I can't agree," said her father. "It's just good luck for us. If any one is to blame, it is young McKimber for talking indiscreetly about his father's private affairs. He was giving secrets away to a stranger."

"Robin doesn't look on me as a stranger. He trusts me. That's what makes me feel so wretched about it."

'Enry seemed little interested in Robin McKimber. He was excited at the idea of the interview on the morrow.

"I believe that's the big thing," he said. "I wish I knew what old Peter has up his sleeve."

"Has Uncle Fleming finished his work up there?" she asked.

"This very morning. That's the real reason I waited for you. I want to know what Milman says."

Neeland Barnes walked toward the pantry, where Bradney was cleaning some silver. He took a seat, lit a cigaret, and complained about young McKimber's attentions to his daughter. Bradney did not take his side.

"I've watched them," said Bradney, "and I think they are the handsomest pair I've ever seen. You must admit that, physically, he is superb. You are wrong in thinking he is forcing unwelcomed attentions on Nita. He is humble and adoring. I'm not much of a judge of these affairs but I think she really likes him." Bradney sighed. "I should like to be looked at as I've caught her looking at him."

"They've only known one another a week," Barnes objected.

"Time means nothing at all," the unworldly footman answered. "That is for the conscious. I have always believed that real love is a matter of the subconscious; an affair of the historical memory."

"Every now and then, when you speak English, I get a glimpse of your meaning," Barnes admitted. "Usually I'm not tuned in on you. But I do know my daughter. She understands thoroughly how impossible these McKimber people are."

"I rather like McKimber," Bradney said. "It is true he has drunk of the wine of Babbittry largely, but that is what every successful man quaffs. If he is autocratic and wants his way you must remember he is the head of a tremendous business and accustomed to giving orders. His wife is quite genial and unaffected. She has begged me not to tempt her with rich dishes. She even invited my opinion as to what would be best for her. I am giving the subject some thought."

McKIMBER wandered about the big rooms fidgeting. He saw his son dancing and his wife talking on the subject of climate and its relation to weight. Raxon was not to be seen. At midnight, when Sneed stood respectfully at his elbow, McKimber was as nervous as one could imagine. But he was too old a campaigner to show it. He followed the butler into a big hexagonal room—this tower study that would soon be famous through the newspapers. It was easy to visualize Paul Raxon leaning back in his customarily indolent way with a specially prepared background. McKimber decided it was effeminate. It provoked in him a feeling of contempt which could not dispel the knowledge that Raxon's surroundings were superb, even if they were presumptuous. Raxon was riding for a fall; he needed to be taught a lesson. It would have been wiser for McKimber to recollect that Raxon had not succeeded through any lack of strength.

"THIS extensive publicity campaign of yours," McKimber began, "doesn't deceive us any."

"Us?" Raxon queried.

"We who represent an organized party in this state. We know you're out to get a primary nomination and as you've got money and a good press agent it doesn't seem easy to prevent it. These primaries play the devil with party obligations. They encourage the malcontents and the ambitious. You are over-ambitious. The Bard of Avon says that's the thing which brought the angels down."

"This is the first time I have been called an angel," said the other.

McKimber frowned; he detested flippancy.

"I prefer to think of you as ambitious rather than to suppose that you want to split our ticket and let Westfield in. If one strong man with his party's solid backing runs against Westfield, he'll beat him."

"That cheers me very much," Raxon replied.

It was not easy for the domineering McKimber to restrain himself. He was accustomed to respect in the field of politics.

"You won't be the man!" he exclaimed.

"And you will—"

"Unless some spiteful malcontent deliberately turns traitor. Up-state, which I control politically, has no use for you; it doesn't know about you. I asked a man from Wayne County the other day if he'd ever heard of Paul Raxon." McKimber smiled. "He said he never went to moving pictures."

"Your mistake," Raxon remarked, "was that you did not ask his wife. The women know me, McKimber. My 'Better Architecture Leagues' are springing up everywhere. There's a flourishing one in Wayne County. The larger cities, such as Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Utica, are taking the thing up admirably. Politicians of your old-fashioned kind resent women in public life and you don't conceal this. Politically, women are hypersensitive because they know they have not accomplished what the world expected of them. I admit your up-state strength exceeds mine, but what about New York City?"

"A stronghold for Westfield!"

"Not so much as you imagine." Raxon yawned a little as though the subject wearied him. "At all events it will be an interesting experiment."

"Experiment!" McKimber cried, shocked at his callousness. "It will be a tragedy for the party."

"It will be your finish," Raxon retorted. His manner had no animus in it. He had neither raised his voice nor shown heat as McKimber had. "Like all old-time politicians you lack mental agility and you won't reconcile yourself to new conditions. In the past you have been of great use to the organization. Today you are merely amusing."

McKimber flushed red and instinctively clenched his big fists. Raxon noted the gesture.

"That demonstrates it perfectly," he said. "When you lose a point or hear a disagreeable truth you want to hit a man. Elemental stuff! We are here to discuss political conditions in this state. I think that is how you put it. Very well. You want me to back down and leave the field to you: I refuse. If the party thinks I've the better chance they'll knife you in a minute. It isn't possible, surely, that you believe gratitude has anything to do with practical politics?"

McKimber did not answer immediately. He was conscious that he had allowed personal antagonism to color his conversation. He adopted the confidential tone which had often won success for him.

"Raxon," he began, "I'm putting my cards on the table."

"Save yourself the trouble," Raxon replied, "I can see them just as well when you hold them in your hands. All you need to understand is that I have a better chance than you to go to Washington. I've been working much longer than you can guess for this very end."

It was growing more difficult for McKimber to control himself.

"Don't you realize you will be denounced as a traitor to your cause?"

"If the cause means so much to you, throw your influence my way. If you did that, Westfield wouldn't have a chance."

"You're damned well right," McKimber shouted. "The man I indorse would get in even if he were you. I'll tell you just this, Raxon. From now on I'm going to devote myself to showing you up for the crooked ward-politician that you are. My God! To think you expect me to work for you!"

"If you're going to be abusive," Raxon said coldly, "we may as well stop."

McKimber shifted into a little less violent mood.

"I take that back," he said. "I recognize that you deserve some reward for what you've done in the past, but I'm entitled to the nomination. One reason is I've given longer service. Another, I hold a greater measure of party confidence. Then too, I'm one of the largest employers of labor in the country. I know how to handle men and money. You got International Motors, but there's more than a suspicion that it wasn't a clean deal. I have no such black mark against me. It is my just reward I want." McKimber's voice became almost conciliatory. "Don't you see the justice of it? I want in my old age the opportunity of serving my country."

"And I," Paul Raxon sneered, "want in my early middle age the opportunity of serving myself. Why drag your country in? Do you think I'm a political idealist just because bad architecture offends me?"

McKimber rose to his feet. Realizing that he had lost, he wanted to go before he forgot that the slender, sneering man was his host.

"They told me you were a dangerous man," he said slowly, "but I don't think they gauged your rottenness correctly."

"I took good care to keep that from them."

"I tell you"—McKimber was thundering again—"all the world shall know what has passed between us."

"If you don't lower your voice all the world will hear now. You're not a broadcasting station. Sit down. I sent for you because there's a lot I have to say which you wouldn't care to miss."

RELUCTANTLY McKimber sank back in his chair, enwrapped by a certain and unwelcome uneasiness. The man facing him seemed so secure, so unconcerned, so sure of ultimate triumph.

"If I stay," he said huskily, "it will be to hear you give away more secrets about yourself. Perhaps I shall learn by what trickery you got this place and how it was you sent Hazen Brewer to his grave."

"I got this place," said Raxon with his old urbanity, "as I have obtained everything else in my life: by using men as tools. I had no early advantages of rich friends or relatives to push me forward; I was not the driving, salesman type you are; but I was obsessed with the idea of power. Not the noisy power you want, but the power that directs and remains unknown. I studied men and found them pugnacious, noisy, vain. It was hard to influence them by my subdued personality even though I had right on my side. I do not mix well; I knew that had to be overcome. In other words, I was determined to develop something to make up for it. My success has come from finding, almost unerringly, the weak spot in every man's make-up. I got my chance at International Motors by finding out so much of Brewer's life in London that he was forced to take me in to protect himself."

"You're a damned blackmailer," McKimber cried hoarsely.

"I am," Raxon agreed. "The phrase does not offend me in the least. Why should it? Is there any more powerful weapon? In the drawer before me are two articles. One is an automatic pistol." Raxon opened the drawer and put the weapon on the writing table at which he sat. "I am not going to threaten you with it. That is old-fashioned, stupid stuff. I am merely reminding you I have it at hand if you should attack me."

There was undisguised amazement in the bigger man's voice.

"Attack you! What for?" There was no doubt that Raxon was really mad. The thought afforded him some relief.

"Because Exhibit B will cause you considerable distress and I have known men of your type to see red in such moments." Raxon held an envelope in his thin hands.

"If it's blackmail you are thinking of in connection with me," said McKimber scornfully, "you are wasting time. Do you suppose my enemies haven't been trying for years to pull me down? It's you who are using old-fashioned, stupid stuff, not me. I tell you my life is an open book."

"With one uncut page," Raxon remarked. "I've cut that page. It cost time and money but it was the best investment I ever made. Think back a bit over this life of yours that is an open book. Is there anything in it that might hurt you if it got out?"

"Not a thing!" cried McKimber defiantly. But there was lacking that ring of confidence he had previously shown. Fear was mastering him.

"VERY well," said Raxon briskly. "You force me to speak. I have known people to give in without making me say all I knew. You talk of yourself as a self-made man who rose from being a machinist to the ownership of a vast organization. That's true. In 'Who's Who' it's written for all the world to see. But there are certain omissions that I can supply. When you were twenty you left Utica for St. Louis and got a job in the Davis foundry. There you studied drafting and three years later, having made good, you entered the employ of William Graham, Mrs. McKimber's uncle, who owned the Rochester Steel and Iron Mills. Later you married his niece."

"Well," said McKimber, his throat constricting, "what about it?"

"Your employer singled her out of all his relatives and left his fortune to her on condition that she married you. He had confidence in you. He had read the open book and liked the contents. If he had had access to that uncut page he would have known that your first wife was still living."

"I divorced her," McKimber cried. "I can prove it!"

"The decree was not made absolute until three months after you married your employer's niece. It's a nice legal point and I've no doubt his other nephews and nieces would be quite ready to fight it. If the condition of getting the fortune was your marriage to Graham's niece, you did not fulfil it because you did not marry her. A bigamous union is not marriage in the eyes of the law. You must have known that, or you wouldn't have gone through a second ceremony. The first marriage was by a justice of the peace. The second was at a New York church. You obtained Graham's fortune under false pretenses and you were a bigamist. It's no good denying it."

"It was all done innocently," McKimber protested. "As God is my witness, I thought I was free to marry. In the divorce suit there was nothing that reflected on me personally."

"What has that to do with it?" Raxon asked cynically. "I admit you have lived a decent life. There is nothing against you morally or politically. For my part I think you have played in hard luck. It may be that you thought you were free to marry. But that makes no difference; the world won't think that. Westfield won't think that. Nor will the big papers that are supporting him. You're through, McKimber; you'll never hold public office again if this gets out. And that's not all. You are going to help me into the Senate and your friends are going to help. I want no lip service. If your friends try to knife me you are the one who will bleed."

McKimber sat motionless. Raxon cared nothing about his innocence. Guilty or innocent, McKimber was the loser. He turned dull eyes toward the envelope Raxon help up.

"In this is the entry of your first marriage. Some one cut a page out of the register and offered it to me for sale. I bought it. There are also some letters you wrote to your first wife when you found she was a secret drinker. Her son by a second marriage sold them to my agent. Pathetic letters in their way, but you know how the modern yellow newspaper laughs at pathetic things, especially when they affect political opponents. I hope the need for publication may never come. Some day they may be yours."

"What do you want for that envelope if it contains what you say?"

"You'll never have half enough money to buy it. Why do you persist in underestimating me? Realize here and now that you are beaten. You will never go to the Senate. If I don't go, then Westfield wins and *you* will be the traitor to your party. No further discussion is necessary. What is it to be: absolute obedience, or do these things go to Westfield?"

McKimber's head drooped. There was a consciousness of physical feebleness about him, a devitalization which he had never before experienced. All anger had left him; it was the measure of his defeat.

"I'm beaten," he said. The structure he had reared by hard work and probity was falling about him in his old age. "I can't talk now. Tomorrow my brain will be clearer." Unsteadily he rose to his feet and walked to the door.

Paul Raxon watched him go out, a broken man. Oriental in his absence of pity, he enjoyed humiliating a domineering man such as McKimber. He disliked big, arrogant men with loud voices and assured gestures.

Raxon was aroused from his pleasing reflections by a noise at the door. It was Alfred, the dark footman who entered and told him that he was wanted on the telephone. Raxon shut the precious envelope in his wall safe and passed out, not even glancing at the man who stood respectfully at the door.

When Fleming Bradney was assured that Raxon had gone, he hurried back into the room. Then he did a curious thing. He knelt by one of the bookcases and pried back a board with a screw driver. Then he peered into the darkness. Reaching into this space, he pulled out Nita, headfirst.

She wore riding breeches and golf stockings and at first could hardly stand upright. The constraint of the position had become torture. Neither of them said a word. They were not to know that there was not concealed somewhere a dictaphone that might record their whispered words. In Nita's hands was a notebook, several pencils and a flashlight. Every word which had passed was taken down. It was her task now to go to her room and transcribe it for Peter Milman's benefit.

It was not until the two had passed the danger zone that they dared speak.

"Well," Bradney demanded, "did you get anything?"

"I got everything," she answered. He wondered why there was no exultation in her voice.

Bradney resumed his duties, which consisted mainly in handing refreshment to thirsty dancers. For a little while he stood by Barnes.

"It's all right," Bradney whispered. "She says she has everything."

"Bet she must be tickled to death, eh?"

"On the contrary, she looked depressed. I didn't understand it at the time. Of course there was physical discomfort and constraint and the possibility of being found out."

"She'll be all right tomorrow," said Barnes gleefully.

Later he had an opportunity to talk it over with the Viscount de Guillain, for whom it was his nightly practice to bring fruit.

"Well," said the sculptor eagerly, "what happened? Has Nita shown you anything yet?"

"No. None of us can go to her room because she's supposed to be out for the evening and the door is locked. Bradney says she wasn't as cheerful as she might have been. I wonder why."

"She might have heard something damaging about McKimber."

"Why should that distress her?"

"Haven't you yet seen that your girl and Robin are in love with one another? Good Lord!" Malet went on passionately. "Are you so blind?"

FLOYD MALET had witnessed the whole affair. He was more sensitive to it than his companions because he had fallen hopelessly in love with the girl himself. It was one of those charming, romantic attachments which come to men of middle years and bring to them at first an agony that time transmutes to the truest of friendships, never wholly separated from the love which brought it to flower.

"Nita would do nothing to upset our plans," Barnes said. "If she has one quality above others that I admire, it is loyalty. She'll stick by us."

"I didn't doubt her loyalty," Malet said quietly. "There is something which brings in its train great suffering. By the way, I leave tomorrow. I'm afraid I have not been much use."

"Why not stay? I heard Raxon asking you to."

"He is bent on suing Bellington for fake furniture and I am given the rôle of principal witness. You see it's impossible. If I'm suspected the whole lot of us will be investigated."

"Nita's as good as fired already," said Barnes. "Gertrude Raxon fights her all the time. I shall be glad to get out of it. I've been talking to the maids about it. They feel certain that she's going and don't want her generous wage scale to be cut down."

There was a tap on the door and Bradney came in.

"I don't like it at all," he began. "I went past Nita's door and she was crying. I'm sure of it. I listened, expecting to hear the faint tap of her noiseless typewriter."

"It must be because of those Raxon girls," Malet hazarded.

"Never!" said her father. "Nita's not that sort. I'm afraid that what she heard is of no use to Milman. Damn it, we're amateurs trying to outwit a professional."

ROBIN McKIMBER usually slept with the soundness that healthy young manhood enjoys. He played hard, worked hard and rarely found anything of sufficient seriousness to keep him awake when the lights were switched off.

On this particular night he was restless. The things in life he had wanted to obtain had come his way. Vaguely he had thought that some day he would marry. There had been many minor attachments which had ceased, run their course as it were, without leaving bitterness in their train. His sudden and complete capitulation to this almost unknown Agatha Brown filled him with that humble joy which even the domineering lover experiences. He was not nearly good enough for her, he had assured himself a thousand times. He knew when he asked her to marry him that it would mean a long fight with an ambitious father. McKimber, senior, although he was not a snob, wanted his son to marry a woman of assured position. This, frankly, a social secretary was not.

Robin smoked many cigarets over the problem. He was surprised in the midst of his vigil to hear a knock at his door. It was his father who came in.

"Why, father!" he cried. "Is anything the matter?"

Mr. McKimber was stooped: his bold resolute carriage was gone. He looked as one might who had undergone severe mental or physical strain.

"Not a thing," said the elder, with an effort at smiling. "I've been thinking, Robbie, and I see I have made a great many mistakes in my life."

Robin listened in silence. Never before had he seen his father in anything but an assured and contented mood.

"Men," McKimber went on, "are too proud of what they think are their own achievements. Every now and then something happens to show them just where they stand and how they are all puppets." He mused a moment. "I had grown to think I was a free agent. I had grown puffed up with success. I began to think this gave me the right to dictate to other men."

"I'm sure," Robin said, embarrassed by this attitude, "you've always been fair in your dealings. Everybody says so."

"I tried to dictate to you awhile ago," said McKimber, "and I tried to dictate to the girl you're fond of. I told you if you didn't marry a girl I approved of we should pull apart. I told her that if any one knowing what money you would inherit thought she could get it by marrying you without my consent there wouldn't be any money."

Robin's face hardened. "You had no right to do that. We may as well understand one another. I've asked Miss Brown to marry me. I haven't your social ambitions. If she won't marry me nobody else will be asked."

"That's the right spirit," said McKimber. His son looked at him amazed. "A man who lets another dictate whom he's to marry is a weakling, and a coward. I didn't. The Grahams, all except old William, hated me. I wasn't well-born or educated. I was a machinist, my hands were thick-fingered and I hadn't any parlor tricks. I married your mother in spite of their lies and plots to separate us."

"But, father," said Robin, puzzled, "I don't see how this squares with what you told me and Agatha."

"It doesn't," said McKimber. "I'm not the man I was yesterday. I've had a vision tonight. I've realized that I've been a marionette for years but didn't know it. No, I'm not ill, Robbie, and I'm not going mad. I'm just—different. If I've made a success of things so far it has been because I married the woman I loved. The young people of today talk a great deal about love in a cynical strain. They think it's smart. They are all wrong. Love is the only foundation to build your home on."

"Do you mean to say you approve of Miss Brown?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. I suppose you are wanting to know why I have changed. Don't ask me, Robbie, but just bring the girl to your mother and me. She shall never want for love where we are."

He walked heavily from the room. His son could not comprehend this astounding change. There was a stricken look in his father's face. Not since Robin was a boy had he been called Robbie. But his speculation on the cause of the change was lost in joy at what it meant to him. Agatha told him she would be back at about ten. He looked at the clock. It was past two. Eight weary hours before he could see her!

AT SEVEN he was on the golf links playing a few holes. Three hours to wait. At eight o'clock he saw her coming slowly in his direction.

"I didn't think you were going to return so early," he said, smiling. "Agatha, how lovely you look!"

"I feel miserable," she said soberly.

"Darling," he whispered, "how can you feel miserable on this bright, glorious morning?"

"Is the sun shining?" she said. "I hadn't noticed."

"It always shines for you," he said.

"Poet!" she cried. "Who would have suspected it?"

"You made me a poet," he replied. "I wish I knew something to rhyme with Agatha. I can manage the other name all right:

"There was a sweet maiden named Brown
Who constantly turned Robin down.
Agatha was her name,
And I think it a shame
That she looked on his suit with a frown.

There's versified truth for you Hard Heart."

"I wish it were not the truth," she answered.

"It isn't," he said. Nothing could depress him now. There was a look in her eyes that told him what he wanted to know.

"But it is," she persisted. "You know, Robin, one isn't always free to do as one likes. I think if I had foreseen this week I should not have had courage enough to endure it. Robin, we must both forget it."

"Forget the only week that I have lived?" he cried. "Never!" Her air of dejection communicated itself to him. "Tell me why I should."

"There are so many things," she said slowly. "One is your father's objection. I like him because he sets such store by you, and I'm not going to come between you and him."

Robin laughed joyously. "Don't worry about him. He's for you now just as strongly as mother is. He thinks you are just the girl to look after me for life. You've conquered him. He just had to give in, so what more is there to say?"

Looking at him, the girl felt that the task she had set herself was beyond her strength. Why, she asked herself, had she kept heart-whole all her life to find in Robin McKimber the only man she could love? How could she tell him that she must choose between her sworn loyalty to her father and her father's comrades and her love for him? She was associated with men who were determined to get from Raxon's safe the documents which incriminated John McKimber and made the realization of his ambitions impossible. She saw very clearly what course Peter Milman would pursue and how in the carrying out of his plans of revenge he would have no consideration for the McKimbers.

"There is more to say," she told him, her voice trembling a little. "My dear, it is the hardest thing I have ever had to say. Robin, it's good-by." The refrain of an old song came to her! "Never again with thee, Robin, never again by the light of the moon."

"Good-by?" he repeated. "Agatha, what do you mean?"

"That I am leaving here today and shall not see you again. Don't ask me to explain. I can't tell you anything except that there is something which makes all the things I hoped impossible."

She could see the gray under his tanned skin, and knew she had wounded him bitterly. There was a terrible quietness in his distinct, clear voice.

"Then you never really loved me."

"I do," she said simply. "That's what makes it so hard."

"If you love me," he cried, "nothing can come between us."

"Something has come between us. I do love you, Robin, and I shall never care for any one else. But there is some one who needs me more than you do."

"That's an excuse," he cried jealously.

But another look at her reassured him. There was a stricken, wounded look on her face.

"And I'm not going to say good-by."

"But you must!" she insisted. "It is all over, Robin. One little week of happiness and years and years of regret."

Suddenly she turned from him and walked away. . . .

After breakfast Mrs. Raxon sent for her social secretary.

"Your month is up today," she said. "I do not think you need remain. I shall pay you for another month in lieu of notice."

"Why are you sending me away?" Miss Brown asked quietly.

"You ought to know," Gertrude Raxon cried. "We've watched you trying to get Robin McKimber as if you were one of our friends instead of being hired to help."

Miss Brown could even smile. "I am quite sure," she said sweetly, "that nobody who knows me would ever suspect me of being your friend."

Half an hour later a taxi came to the front door and Miss Agatha Brown left Great Rock.

"My dears," she had said to the footmen, "you must stay on if you can until Uncle Peter has read what I have written. He may have other uses for you here."

The blond footman dropped his cockney accent and the lackey's manner as he kissed her. "Shan't be very long here, I expect," he said. "I'm getting tired of it. Just as I open a bottle of wine and light a good cigar some damned nobody rings for ice water, or the fire needs logs, or there's a mouse in a bedroom and I'm elected to slay it."

"But, Daddy," she reproved him, "you are here on duty and a very great deal more may depend on you than you think. I've been awfully proud of the way you carried it off."

Neeland Barnes went about his work with greater spirit. He had needed a few such words to strengthen him.

"When I think of a man of your genius doing this sort of thing," she said to Fleming Bradney as she shook hands, "I can't admire you enough." She left them, smiling brilliantly. They felt she had the secret of success with her. Yet, alone in the taxicab, she cried unrestrainedly.

PETER MILMAN received the transcription Nita had made from her rough notes without showing the tremendous eagerness that possessed him.

"You have done splendidly," he said, and then hesitated a little. "I am almost afraid to read it."

"You need not be," she said slowly. "I think you will find that you have saved your home."

"Then it is complete success?" he cried.

"There is still more to be done," she said, "but I think we have succeeded." She could not bear to talk any more.

In his library, Peter Milman read the document carefully. He saw exactly with what a deadly grip Paul Raxon held McKimber. McKimber was not the usual sort of party politician. His reputation for square dealing had been rightly earned. He was a director in many great corporations, trustee of a university, owner of a huge plant and, but for this early misfortune, could have gone to the Senate.

But Peter Milman was not yet in a position to turn this knowledge to account. So far, McKimber was the sufferer in that, whereas only one man had known his secret, now it was shared by many. Milman had little sympathy for the politician. To a man of Milman's way of thinking McKimber's behavior had been stupid, but beggary did not stare him in the face as a consequence. It was just McKimber's turn to suffer. Milman thought of the thing impartially as though he were an arbitrator and McKimber's case had come before him: on the one side McKimber and Raxon; on the other himself, Barnes, Bradney and Malet. He persuaded himself that it was justice against injustice, right against wrong. He had brooded too long over the prospect of losing his home to have any qualms left. He waited impatiently until the hour when he expected Bradney and Barnes. They could not leave Great Rock until past ten o'clock and it was almost midnight when he passed them Nita's report.

"The next thing to do is to obtain that envelope," Milman said. "We know it is in that room somewhere."

"There's a big wall safe of a modern type," Barnes said.

"And therefore absolutely out of the question," Bradney commented. "I have long felt that there must be an apprenticeship to this sort of enterprise. Safe-blowing is practiced successfully by almost all the yeggs who wander everywhere. I know how it is done, but I couldn't do it myself."

"We dare not hire any one to do it for us," Barnes said thoughtfully. "It seems to me we are up against it. Of course in moving pictures it's easy enough; one drops on his knees, turns the knob and listens. After a time it springs open, as if by magic. If you haven't enough to hold him up with already I don't see what else is to be done."

"THERE'S a way out," said Milman, "and a simple one. I admit we cannot crack a safe. I don't see why we should imperil ourselves with nitroglycerin in the attempt. Nor is there any need to hire a professional. Why not permit Paul Raxon to open it for us?"

"He wouldn't!" Barnes cried. "Torture would not make him do that."

"You don't understand," said Peter mildly. "I mean simply this: why should Raxon not open the safe, as he must do frequently, quite unaware that some one is ready to spring on him, tie him up and examine its contents at leisure?"

"By Gad!" Barnes said excitedly. "It might work. There's danger in it but there's an even chance it might succeed. I see the whole thing. I could be hiding where Nita was—there's plenty of room—and watch him. He wouldn't be carrying that gun of his because he would probably have locked himself in and would feel free from intrusion. I should be lying there watching him through some loophole and could creep out and grab him."

"And if for the moment you lost your stealthiness, he would turn and kill you," Bradney remarked. He was growing rather fond of his fellow footman.

"Not necessarily kill. Not necessarily hit even. I've missed at close range before now. I've got the whole thing in my head. When it comes to quick action, I'm there. If you'll make that end of the bookcase movable so that it can be opened without warning Raxon, I believe I can get him."

"Give me two uninterrupted hours," Bradney asserted, "and I can make a very workmanlike job of it."

"Not a word before Nita," her father cautioned. "She might want to come in on it and there's just a chance it may turn out badly."

"Again I seem to be leaving other men to take the risks," Milman sighed. "Is there no way in which I can help?" .

"You have!" cried Barnes. "It's your idea. I should never have thought of it. I was all for direct attack on the safe, which couldn't have been successful."

"How often does a financier open his safe?" Bradney asked. "I can see 'Enry lying there, entombed, for periods of uncomfortable duration. 'Enry has forgotten he will be helping me to attend to the Raxon guests."

"I won't be there," said Barnes. "I shall dismiss myself tomorrow morning and then come back to my old room when it is dark. Only Sneed and you ever use our flight of stairs, so it will be safe." Barnes chuckled. "You'll have to smuggle my meals up. I shall ring repeatedly for ice water."

"Some one will come to take your place."

"Sneed will attend to that."

The three—Malet had not come—talked the thing over. If once the letters were in Milman's possession he did not think it likely that Raxon would quarrel at the price, enormous though it was, that he would be called upon to pay. McKimber would suffer, but they could not grieve about that. The main thing was that Raxon would have to acknowledge he was beaten and to maintain his hold on McKimber he must pay out a million dollars.

They told Nita of it when she came in. She did not venture to disagree, but her depression was noticeable. It was so unlike the cheerful laughing girl. She gave as a reason a headache. But it was a heartache that troubled her. The father of Robin was to be disgraced. She and her volunteered activities were the direct cause. For a moment she thought of pleading with them, but she refrained when she saw no other way of making Raxon pay. She must be loyal to those with whom she had begun this adventure. But it was very hard. All her world had been changed in that moment when she had seen Robin looking at her from the big car that had swerved so perilously. He would never see her again. To the day of his death he would believe she had played with him, used him for a summer flirtation and then had forgotten him.

HENRY gave notice next morning. He was lofty and not to be persuaded. By nightfall he was back in his own room. He had purchased a dark sweater and black sneakers and, by the use of those devices which he had learned in amateur theatricals, had disguised his face. Bradney had employed his leisure time by doing some surreptitious carpentering in the tower room. Sneed had arranged to give instant warning if Raxon returned unexpectedly from the city. But as a chauffeur had been told to meet the train arriving at half-past six there seemed to be no reason to fear interruption.

The bookcase was six feet high and contained five shelves. The lower, behind which Nita had hidden, was given up to volumes whose average height was eighteen inches. They were all bound copies of French and English architectural magazines. The shelves were very deep, made to accommodate books of more than average width, many of which were deeper than their height. They rested on a board seven inches above the floor. Bradney ingeniously had split this so that while the books were not disturbed the man hiding had an additional seven inches of shelter. He had the craft of a cabinetmaker; when he had finished the oiled and hidden hinges moved noiselessly.

It was as dinner drew to a close that the disguised Barnes crawled feet-first into his shelter. He had arranged things so that he could see the safe without moving. There was nothing in his garments to catch on any projection. He found he could move his limbs without any noise. He tried it with Bradney, directly after dinner while their employer settled to a game of auction. Bradney sat in Raxon's chair and looked hard at the lower shelf but could detect nothing unusual. It was not so difficult for Barnes to remain immobile and patient as for some. He had the hunter's instinct highly developed; this was a game after his own heart.

At ten he was tired but cheerful. At midnight he began to suffer from the hardness of the floor. It was nearly one when Paul Raxon entered. He took a seat at the center table and put on it some small change and bills—bridge winnings, no doubt. Then he lighted a cigar and went to the door leading to his bedroom, soon to reappear with a velvet smoking jacket. It seemed to Barnes that he paced up and down before the bookcase for hours. Then, suddenly, he went to the safe, turned the combination swiftly and flung the door open. He seemed to be searching feverishly for some one thing in its deep recesses.

VERY quietly Barnes pushed open the oaken side of his prison. It made no sound. Then, as noiselessly, he emerged. His next move was to crawl to the shelter of the table where he was temporarily safe. He could see that Raxon was still searching. Stealthily Barnes rose to knees, then to his feet and came nearer, inch by inch, to the unsuspecting man. He covered the last few intervening feet in a leap. Raxon, his head twisted sidewise by the fearful agonizing force of a blow on the jaw, caught sight of a face wholly unknown to him, whose disguise was palpable but sufficient. He was thrown forward on the heavily padded lounge. While he was fighting for breath his hands were tied behind him. Then a loop of rope was forced into his mouth and something pulled down over his head so that he could see nothing. Next he was dropped to the ground and pushed through a narrow door. After that he was not molested. But he could hear some one at the safe. Papers rustled, drawers were opened. Then the steel doors swung to. Later his locked door was opened and shut. After that for hours there was blackness and cramp, rage and despair.

Although he could not shout he found he could make inarticulate noises. He made them till his throat ached and the corners of his mouth were raw from the harsh rope. He had no idea yet where he was. He supposed Bellington must have prepared this secret place and kept its locality hidden. Perhaps through it there had come men ere this who had spied upon him. Cramps seized him whose agony left him white and feeble. Perhaps he would starve to death here. It was well known that his movements were uncertain, secretive, and that he was impatient of questioning. It would be found that his bed was unoccupied. They would not look for him here. They would hunt far afield while he starved to death in this tower of retreat. No shame or repentance came to him. Instead he cursed himself for carelessness. In his former home he had preserved almost an excessive caution; but he had supposed in so large a household as this, with many servants and guests, he was safe. There were other rooms which should have attracted burglars more than these—rooms where women kept their diamonds. To come here argued a preconceived plan.

ACCORDING to Barnes's instructions Sneed, at breakfast, asked if he should arouse Mr. Raxon or see if he wanted his coffee in his room. As a rule Raxon was up early. In the end they discovered him. His mouth was swollen and discolored and he could not rise to his feet when Bradney cut the bonds. His condition was deplorable. He would tell his wife nothing; neither would he hear of the police being notified.

"I know who did it," he lied, "and I will attend to him myself. This must not get into the papers. If it does I shall know it comes from one of you three." He looked coldly at his wife, his butler and the footman.

It was Bradney alone who dared to meet his gaze; he welcomed the opportunity to see a man of whom he had heard so much bad, at whose hands he had himself experienced ill-treatment, at a moment when his usual control was gone. It seemed to the scientist that for a minute the mask was lifted and the terrific emotions which he had kept hidden were let loose. He cursed his wife. He called Sneed a timid, worthless creature who had allowed a thief to break through and assault him. Bradney, towering over them all, came in for his share. Where had this hulking flunky been that the marauder had stolen upon him?

Bradney was secretly amused. Then he saw his chance to escape. He recalled some of Barnes's gestures and gave notice at once. There could hardly be suspicion of collusion. It seemed to Mrs. Raxon that here was a courteous and efficient manservant goaded to rare insubordination. Sneed suddenly took the resolve to depart with his footman.

"Not till I make sure you're not a party to this affair," Raxon cried.

"Very good, sir," said Sneed, bowing. "I will inform the police. I have my reputation to protect from slander, sir, and I'll consult my lawyer."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," Raxon growled. "Go if you want to. This is my affair and I won't have the police in it."

Sneed enjoyed the opportunity of standing on the lofty eminence of his outraged dignity.

"Not until you have withdrawn your charges, sir," he said firmly.

"That's a good idea," said Bradney. "Now I come to think of it I may be involved, too. I'd prefer an investigation; I'm not going out under a cloud."

"Go to hell, both of you," Raxon exploded. "You haven't the nerve to be in on a thing like this." He turned to his wife. "Pay them and see that they leave at once."

Sneed turned on his heel and left the room, followed by the second footman.

"If any of those other people heard any commotion, just tell them I had a fainting spell and shall be all right tomorrow." Raxon almost pushed his wife from the room and turned the key.

He hoped, as he walked to the safe, that he would find the robbery had been made by professionals for readily convertible plunder. He hardly dared to search for the McKimber exhibits.

The envelope which had held what would have kept McKimber a pliant and obedient tool was gone. Negotiable securities and a large sum of cash were untouched. It was plain that the intruder had come for one thing only and had been successful. The man who would have most to gain by this robbery was young Robin McKimber, who must have learned of the danger in which his father stood. In figure, young McKimber was like the man of whom Raxon had had one fleeting glance.

Never would there be the opportunity to get any more incriminating letters. The page stolen from the register could not be replaced. What a fool he had been not to have them photographed! To implicate the politicians without them would be almost impossible. Were McKimber to make a bold stand and accuse his enemy of attempted blackmail, the public would probably flock to the support of the older and better-known man. It was the greatest blow Paul Raxon had ever received; he felt that the humiliation of it would never leave him. He who had warned his opponent of the folly of underestimating him had himself fallen into that very trap.

THAT evening found the Japanese garden in lower Fifth Avenue occupied by the Milman conspirators. During the dinner, which was perceptibly better served because Sneed had dropped back into his old place and Achille was less hurried, there was no word said about Great Rock. It was when Sneed had taken the coffee away that Milman began. He complimented them all on what they had done, but it was Barnes who came in for the greatest praise. His daughter watched him growing younger as he listened to Peter's encomiums. Barnes felt that at last he had been able to do his share.

"We are now," Milman went on, "in the position of holding what Raxon was going to use to lever himself into a senatorial seat. I have little doubt in my mind but that he will pay the price asked, which is a million dollars. Without this evidence he has no actual hold on McKimber. With it he can command his absolute obedience. I feel certain that with McKimber's help Raxon can win. Without it he has little chance. The question is this: Is the senatorship worth a million dollars to Paul Raxon? If not, we are worse off than when we began. If it is, we have won."

MILMAN looked about him as does the chairman of a meeting who desires suggestions. None would have supposed that there was a very real risk of disgrace and imprisonment if Raxon refused to buy and determined to prosecute.

"If you had looked into his face," Bradney remarked, "and had seen all the passions of hate and disappointment, fear and despair graven on it, you would have no doubt at all on the subject. I'm certain he will buy them back."

"But he'll try and get us," Barnes reminded him. "I wasn't any too gentle."

"There is always that danger," Peter Milman observed calmly. "But when a man has so overpowering an ambition as his, he may use caution which is really abhorrent. I have no doubt he will wish he could put us in Singsing. But better counsel will show him that it is dangerous. Before we see him we must rehearse some of the circumstances in which we were injured by him. I want him to think that we all know very certainly by what means he hurt us. In case he should decline to buy these letters he must understand that he cannot prosecute us."

Floyd Malet had said little; he was watching Nita's sensitive face. He did not understand how it was the others did not realize she was suffering. They had assumed that she was wholly with them and as eager as they were to win. It was because Malet loved her that he knew what was passing in her mind. He had seen her with Robin. He knew that she loved the lad and suffered torture at the thought she was going to aid in giving Paul Raxon the whip hand over him.

It was plain to Floyd Malet that his own love for the girl must be kept secret. His love, he reflected, must find its reward in service. How could he help her? Was it possible to bring her happiness? The other men were talking about Robin's father.

"He will suffer," said Mr. Milman impartially, "and his family will suffer. I am sorry for them; but in this case our interests weigh down the balance. McKimber at all events has money and an assured position."

"Why not offer to sell the letters to him, then?" Malet cried. "You will get your money just the same and you will be defeating Raxon." He noticed that Nita listened eagerly for the reply.

"There are two reasons against it: one, that we know Raxon to be a crook used to chicanery, fraud and blackmail. He will not protest no matter how we obtained these letters. He will probably pay. With McKimber it is different. How shall we convince him that if he buys these letters he is free from subsequent blackmail? He will know that his secret is shared by many others and he will never feel safe. As he probably won't run for office now anyway, he may make a fight of it. He has money. He can retain the best counsel while we are handicapped from the start. It is not a matter of choosing to benefit one at the cost of the other. Personally I am inclined to be sorry for McKimber. With us all it is merely the easiest and safest way to get the money from the man who has defrauded us."

"Who's to bell the cat?" Barnes asked. "How are you going to talk it over with Raxon?"

"I think if I telephone him he will come."

"But he might bring a gang of thugs with him," Barnes objected. "He can get a bunch of gunmen any time he needs them. What's to prevent him going through this place and getting the letters?"

"It is not a house easy to break into, as you know. He will not be admitted if he does not come alone. If he is as desperately anxious for these letters as I believe, he will obey our instructions."

MALET had an opportunity of talking with Nita later in the evening

"A few mornings ago," he said softly, "you met young McKimber in the grounds at Great Rock. You had a few minutes with him and then left him. You said you thought you had been breaking your heart. Nita, what did you mean?"

She smiled at him. "Did I say that? How silly! Doesn't one exaggerate before breakfast?"

"You can't deceive me like that," he answered. "You are fond of Robin and you are torn between two emotions, your love for him and your loyalty to your father. What you would like to do is to take those accursed letters and give them to Mr. McKimber without letting his wife or son know they ever existed."

"I would rather do that than anything else," she admitted. She saw that it was useless to conceal it from the sculptor. And she knew, too, that this middle-aged genius with the worn face and quiet ways loved her. "It is very hard, Uncle Floyd," she said, smiling whimsically, "to feel one is betraying where one loves."

"You are not doing that," he protested.

"But I am! It is impossible to avoid knowing it. When Raxon gets those letters nothing can save Mr. McKimber from constant humiliation. If you had heard the tone Raxon used you would understand better. How can I deny having helped to send the father of my Robin to disgrace?" She was silent for a moment. "I can see him losing self-respect and sinking lower and lower. His wife and son won't understand; it will be horrible for them. I have sent away the man I love, letting him believe that I am heartless, without faith or honor. And I can never open my lips to justify myself. There is nothing that can save either of us."

"Don't say that!" Malet cried, deeply moved. "There is always a way out when it is right that there should be. And if ever a thing was right it is that you and he should belong to one another. Something shall be done. My dear, I'm your middle-aged knight whose armor is dented and rusty but who doesn't care what wounds he gets in his lady's cause." He rose to his feet, his face lighted with enthusiasm.

"There is nothing any one can do," she said.

"Doesn't one exaggerate after dinner?" He laughed. "My dear, go to bed and sleep. The least of all your uncles is on the job."

Malet found he had recaptured something of the fiery energy of youth. The mental and physical sloth which had settled upon him in Philadelphia had gradually been dispelled and was no more to be seen. He had enlisted himself in Nita's service and was anxious to be about his work.

It was to Peter Milman that he first addressed himself.

"Milman," he began, "I'm very much interested in the outcome of a romance that began under my eyes at Great Rock." Malet flung himself down in a chair and lit a cigaret. "You know that to men of middle age who have of necessity passed by the time of love and roses there is something very fascinating in seeing splendid youth in its great moments."

Peter Milman did not show his visitor that this interruption was unwelcome.

"I suppose so," he assented courteously.

"I'm talking about Nita," Malet went on. "The man she fell in love with—"

"She fell in love with?" Milman demanded. "Really, that's interesting. Her father did not tell me."

"He hardly knows it," said Malet. "Barnes is a believer in caste. He cannot believe it possible—despite his altered circumstances—that his daughter could fall in love with any one not eligible to the society in which he once moved,—your sort of society, Milman. Yes, Nita fell in love and I saw the whole drama unfolding before my eyes. In the beginning I did not like him. I suppose there was a stupid, elderly jealousy at the bottom of it."

"Who was it?"

"Young McKimber—Robin McKimber."

"He will be very rich," said Milman, "and Barnes's objections can be overruled. I have never met the McKimbers but he is said to be a man of good character."

"They can't possibly marry," Malet declared. "She has broken off with him and she won't change her mind. Poor child, it was a wound that may never heal."

"Why, if she loves him and he loves her, should she do that?"

"Because she knows that she is acting for the enemies of his father."

"We are not Mr. McKimber's enemies," Milman retorted.

"No! We are going to sell McKimber body and soul to Paul Raxon. Do you suppose knowing that, Nita can marry McKimber's son?"

MILMAN frowned. "Dear, dear!" he said, almost testily. "Nita went there for a definite purpose which had as much to do with her father personally as it had for you, Bradney or myself. These complications are annoying, most annoying, but they cannot affect our plans."

"My dear Milman," Malet said, "if you are blaming Nita for falling in love you are making the first absurd remark I have ever known to come from you. Love comes unsought, unexpected, often in its beginnings, unwanted. I tell you I saw the whole thing. She held back, she tried to avoid him, but the circumstances were such that she could not. There were dances and tennis parties, riding expeditions and golf. Nita could not run away. She was, as you remarked, there for a definite purpose. Robin is as splendid in his way as she is. He's a clean lad, too, who knew very well that in wanting to marry Agatha Brown he was offending his father and cutting himself off from a fortune. You must give him credit. Robin McKimber's a man. I think he is as badly broken up as Nita. You see, he cannot understand it. Naturally she cannot give him even a hint of the real reason."

"I'm immeasurably sorry that you had to tell me this," said Peter Milman.

"Why?" Malet demanded.

"Because it infuses an element of bitterness in what was wholly a mood of victory. I am sorry for them both—but is it not possible that you with your artist's sensitiveness have put this in too vivid a light?"

"If anything, I've understated it." Malet could see that old Peter Milman was genuinely disturbed.

"Let me put it in another way. Is it not possible that you, with your ready sympathy, have imagined the temporary infatuation that is so often seen in house parties to be a grand passion?"

"Milman," said Malet slowly, "if I could believe you were right I should be perfectly happy. But I saw them together; I spoke to each of them when they had said good-by. No, it was the real thing. They will never completely recover. Nita has slain her own happiness because of the loyalty she thinks she owes to us."

"Thinks?" Milman repeated. "Is there any doubt about that? Was it lightly, do you suppose, that I stooped to what we have done? I have never deluded myself about it. We have done what men of honor do not attempt. What punishment Raxon deserves is not ours to administer. After I have forced him to pay I shall never be quite the clean man I was. I knew this very well before I invited you to join me. You must not expect me to be swerved by anything now."

"Do you think I am trying to swerve you, as you call it?"

"For what other purpose have you told me this? You have said, in so many words, that if we do as we have planned we are breaking Nita's heart."

"You will be," Malet asserted, "but you'll never know it from her. That's how she defines loyalty."

"Have you forgotten what your life has been of late and to whom you owe all your unhappiness?"

"I am past fifty," Malet answered, "and what is left of my life seems very small and unimportant when I compare it with the happiness that is owed Nita."

"You would go back to that miserable life in Philadelphia and become again the depressed, hopeless man you were when I first asked you here?" Amazement was in Milman's voice.

"Yes, I would go back again," Malet said, "but I should never again be the man I was. You can't understand that, I suppose."

"By comparison I see myself in a very poor light," Milman answered. "But there is Barnes to think of, and Bradney."

Malet sighed. "It was too big a thing to expect. I had so little to lose if it failed; you had so much." He rose to his feet. "I had to tell you what your victory meant to Nita. I was going to appeal to the others but as you have refused, it will not be of much use."

Peter Milman paced up and down the

room. What Malet had said made him unhappy. Chivalrous by nature, just, and not embittered by what life had brought him, he was confronted with a situation unparalleled in his career. He remembered noticing that Nita was depressed; she had drooped like a tall lily. Now he knew why. And, knowing it, he lost his zest for the task of disciplining Raxon.

"I HAVE not refused definitely," he said. "I must think it over in all its significance. In the end there is little doubt but I shall have to decide against you. I wish it had not happened." Suddenly he held out his hand to the man who was willing to make the magnificent sacrifice gladly. "I must add to my strong personal liking for you an increased respect. Not many would do as you have done. Come and see me about this before breakfast tomorrow."

Fleming Bradney was smoking a last pipe when Malet entered his room. The physicist was relaxed and happy. His domestic duties had been a strain and he was now concerned with the growing of his new beard.

"A great protection to a sensitive man, a beard is," he commented stroking his chin. "One can retire behind it and grin vacuously, sneer evilly, and still conceal his thoughts. Laboratory experiments have robbed me of it several times, but after this I hope it will be permanent."

"Fleming," Malet began, "do you like Nita?"

"Like her?" Bradney said warmly "She is the most delightful girl I have ever met. She is the only woman who has ever made me wish I were as young and good-looking as Robin McKimber. If she were my daughter I should think fortune had made up for everything else."

"You must have noticed she was looking rather unhappy?"

"I taxed her with it. It's the strain she's been living under; she'll soon pick up."

"She'll never be really happy again. Fleming, if her father wins, she loses. Our victory is won at the cost of parting her from the man she loves—the man who loves her well enough to risk losing his fortune."

Malet told Bradney in almost the same words what he had told Peter Milman. The first rush of sympathy which Bradney felt for the lovers was tempered on reflection when he considered what the effect of yielding to it would mean. The work he believed he might accomplish in the world would not be done. Again he would be compelled to seek some uncongenial position. He said as much to his friend.

"But if you admit I'm putting you in an unfavorable light it is evident you think you are choosing the wrong thing," Malet retorted.

"I'm choosing to enjoy the rewards of an adventure which might have landed me in jail—and may yet. I'm very sorry about Nita, but she is young. Life is before her, whereas I'm past middle age. Floyd, you are intoxicating yourself not with sentiment but with sentimentality. It's a symptom of a generous nature but it yields before a logical examination. I am not going to throw away what we have gained. You must not ask it of me. Good Lord! Do you suppose I am content to go back to my job at the refinery when there's a chance to escape?"

"I suppose not," Malet said wearily. "The way of sacrifice is too hard."

Bradney frowned. He did not rest easily under the imputation that he was choosing the selfish way.

"At least I have Peter Milman with me," he said.

"I am not so sure. Will you line up with him whichever way he decides?"

"I shall be with him in any case but I don't think that will help you much."

Neeland Barnes was stretched at length on a chaise longue in his room. He looked up with a smile.

"What brings you here?"

"I thought I'd drop in and have a cigaret. What are you doing?" Barnes had a notebook and pencil in his hand.

"Planning my ranch in California. I shall keep horses. I'll get one for you with a nice easy gait."

"BARNES," Malet broke in on Barnes's mood, "haven't you yet found out that Nita is in love with young McKimber?"

"Impertinent puppy!" Barnes stormed. "If I'd been in your place instead of being cast for a damned flunky this would never have happened. I'm not sure but you could have stopped it if you'd tried."

"Stopped it?" Malet returned. "You talk

like a fool. I could just as easily have stretched out a hand and dammed the Colorado River in flood."

Hastily he related the story that had been told Milman and Bradney.

"What's the good of telling me this?" Barnes said. "Do you suppose I want to go back to Peekskill?"

"You won't have to. You are six hundred dollars to the good, your wardrobe is enlarged, and you've Nita. Milman admits that what we have done leaves us less clean than we were—"

"It won't hurt me," said Barnes. "You wouldn't notice it on my hide."

"I'm not approaching you from that angle," Malet said craftily. "I'm reminding you that you are winning success at Nita's expense. I'm not in the least doubt about you. With Bradney and Milman there was a much greater chance of defeat."

"What the devil are you counting on?" Barnes demanded.

Malet put his arm on the other's shoulder.

"On the thoroughbred strain in you. I'm relying on the fact that when the test comes the thoroughbred responds."

He watched Barnes, who sat silent for almost five minutes. Barnes did not break the silence until he had torn up the copious notes he had made concerning the ranch in California over which he knew now he would never ride.

"I'll do what the others want me to do." he said.

Malet knocked again at Bradney's door.

"Barnes has come through," he said, smiling. "I know you despise men given over to sport and athletics, but when it comes to a showdown they have the right kind of heart. God protect me from a world governed by intellect! Good night."

Next morning Malet went into Milman's room before breakfast.

"Before you say anything," he began, "I may as well tell you that Barnes is on my side and Bradney ready to do what you say."

"I thought they would be," said Milman. "I have not slept and I tried in vain to convince myself you were wrong. I give in. I have had a great deal of figuring to do to meet the changed conditions. Tell me, how would you like to live just outside Florence?"

"You ask me, a sculptor, how I should like to live there near the Bargello and the Uffizi?"

"I did not tell you, I think, of my villa there. It lies on the hills to the west of the city and overlooks the gardens of the Villa Palmieri. It has about twenty rooms and was well furnished. The gardens are productive and charming. Years ago I gave it to a distant cousin. She died recently and it comes to me again. I find after settling my affairs there will be enough for us all to live comfortably in Italy, where the exchange rate favors us very much."

"I don't understand you," stammered Malet. Was this an indication that Peter Milman had deliberately thrown away this New York home?

"I sent Sneed to Nita's room with a request that she would give me five minutes after you left last night. You were quite right. I shall always remember that you were the first one of us to do the right thing. I could never live in this house happily, knowing that to do so was the price of her unhappiness. I am growing older but I do not think I am growing bitterer. It is sometimes better not to succeed. Perhaps our reward may be that we have got out of our ruts. We were all plodding along deep furrows, seeing nothing ahead. I had almost forgotten the villa outside Florence until I saw it mentioned in Loddon's bill. We shall live very comfortably in a house built on a meadow that Dante once owned. My cousin, poor lady, essayed to model in clay, and there is an excellent studio. For Barnes there will be a change—and Chianti. Bradney shall write a book or do what he chooses. I am not to be left alone. I have come, after years of isolation, to depend on you—" He broke off abruptly as Nita came in.

"Well, my dears," she said, "what plot have I interrupted? I came to see why the coffee was getting cold downstairs."

"We are on our way to Florence," said Malet.

FLOYD MALET'S movements for the next few days were rapid and successful. He found himself for the first time in the city of Rochester. The McKimbers had a big place in its most fashionable residence section, a city block of it where most were contented with a hundred-foot frontage.

Robin McKimber on his way from the works to his home passed swiftly by a man of middle size whose carriage seemed familiar. The stranger did not observe the scrutiny. Robin felt he was not deceived; the bogus viscount had shorn off his mustache and imperial. He had now a brisker way of walking. Actually, Robin noted, the imposter whistled gaily.

Floyd Malet felt a harsh grip on his arm. He was spun around to stare into the cold face of young McKimber.

"Well," said McKimber, "how is my friend the viscount?"

"Much better," said Malet undisturbed.

"Damn it!" Robin exploded. "Don't try to shake hands with me."

"I came to your fair city for no other purpose. I want to see your father at once."

"My father isn't well," said Robin. "He doesn't see strangers."

"HE WILL see me," said Floyd Malet airly, "because I bring him back his youth, his reputation and a future." By this time they had come to the car which Robin had parked by the curb. "If this is your motor let us lose no time."

"Look here!" said Robin. "You deliberately lied to me about Miss Brown's address." When Nita disappeared so suddenly from Great Court he had sought to trace her through the "viscount." "I cabled to England and Lady Horsham had never heard of Misss Agatha Brown."

"I didn't give you her aunt's address," said Malet. "I referred you to a duchess traveling in Tuscany."

"Her aunt?" Robin cried.

"The Countess of Horsham is the aunt of the lady we will call for the moment Miss Agatha Brown. She spoke truly in not having heard of any such person."

"I've got to know more about this!" Robin exclaimed.

"You will not while you grip my arm like that. I have come to see your father. Until I do see him I shall not say any more."

"I don't understand," Robin protested.

"Probably not. Understanding is the consolation of those who have left youth behind them."

Ten minutes later Malet was in McKimber's private room. The man who was now working as Raxon dictated showed very markedly his depression.

"I think I'd better see you alone," Malet suggested.

"Why?" said McKimber slowly. "My son is my full partner in everything."

"Even in your St. Louis affairs?"

"I don't know what you have to do with St. Louis but he knows everything that happened to me there."

"This simplifies matters very much," said Malet. "Now, gentlemen, if you will listen carefully you will hear a most enthralling story, the first essay in serious crime of men hitherto undistinguished in the crooks' 'Who's Who.' "

When the recital had ended a new McKimber stared into Malet's eyes. It seemed that he had sloughed off years. In place of depression was hope and a returning health. McKimber held his arm in an iron grip.

"Young man," he said to Malet, subtly flattering him, "never yet has any one done me a good turn and lost by it. This goes for you and the others." He turned to his son and commanded him to get three numbers on the long-distance wire. "I'm interested in Peter Milman's association with Brewer. Maybe I can get something back out of the wreck. But don't tell him that yet. When can I see him and the rest?"

"We thought if you could be at Milman's place three nights hence we would arrange to have Raxon there. Bradney and I have staged rather a pretty little scene. Of course Raxon won't expect to see you or any one but Milman."

"Can I come?" Robin McKimber asked anxiously.

"I think it might be arranged," Malet smiled. He could say no more because McKimber bombarded him with questions and made innumerable notes. He was a shrewd and hard-headed man. Malet took the midnight train back to New York, feeling he had made a friend. Robin's changed attitude was amusing. He listened with the greatest deference to Malet's remarks and thrust something into his hands as he boarded the train.

"Thank you," Malet said, "but I don't deserve a tip."

"It's a letter for her." Robin flushed a little.

ON THAT Thursday evening which was ever afterward memorable in the lives of Peter Milman's guests, Paul Raxon walked down Fifth Avenue wondering for what purpose he had been asked to confer with the recluse. Over the telephone Milman said it was a matter of urgent import and had to do with his political ambitions. Ordinarily Raxon would have suspected danger, but not when Peter Milman was concerned. He knew that his defeat of Brewer had involved Milman but Loddon always assured him that his former client seemed to cherish no malice. Loddon had always described him as one too much wrapped in the memories of the past to understand modern finance. It was possible that Milman might reproach him for Brewer's failure but that had nothing to do with political ambition.

The Milmans had been a great family intermarried with those who wielded immense financial power. Their prestige was undoubted in New York. Perhaps Peter Milman, brooding over his misfortune, had some scheme to utilize the influence of his kin. The message was given in such a way as to enlist Raxon's lively interest. It was impossible to think of a visit to this austere mansion as in any sense perilous.

A French manservant admitted him, and showed him into a splendid drawing-room. The brilliant group which Malet had done many years before took Raxon's eye immediately although he was ignorant of the sculptor's name. He was examining the group closely when Peter Milman entered. Raxon looked at him intently. He saw a slim man in correct evening dress. There was a coldness about Peter Milman's manner that was not reassuring. It was almost as if the presence of Raxon were an offense. Milman looked toward the sculptured group.

"I see you are interested in that."

"I am," Raxon responded. "Who did it?"

"One who should have been our greatest sculptor but for an unjust accusation which ruined him." Milman saw Raxon's eyes narrow. "Floyd Malet."

"Malet?" Raxon repeated as if searching his memory. "Oh, yes, I think I call his case to mind. Wasn't he mixed up in a studio orgy where a woman was killed, or died under mysterious circumstances?"

"Something of the sort," Milman answered. He pointed to a seat. "Please sit down, Mr. Raxon."

"I'm wondering what you can possibly have to say to me."

Peter Milman smiled. "I am quite sure you are. It has to do mainly with your political future. It seems you wish to go to the Senate from this state. My grandfather was a senator for many years and I still retain an interest in politics."

"You didn't ask me to call just to hear that," Raxon said bluntly.

"There is more to come—much more."

THE door opened and Fleming Bradney came in. Frowning, Raxon looked up at him.

"Professor Bradney," said Milman genially, introducing him. "One of our great physicists now obliged by unkind circumstances to act as footman in the houses of lesser men. No, not in this house, Mr. Raxon. Here Professor Bradney is an honored guest." Milman turned to Bradney. "This is Mr. Paul Raxon, who aspires to high office."

Raxon turned on his host with a snarl. He had been tricked.

"If you are harboring a dismissed servant of mine who left under circumstances which point to his dishonesty, let me remind you it's a dangerous thing to do."

"After a lifetime of orderly quiet one welcomes such dangers." Peter Milman peered into the red-flecked eyes of his guest.

The door opened again and Neeland Barnes entered.

"This is Mr. Neeland Barnes," said Milman. "Perhaps you know him best under his name of Henry. He tells me he enjoyed every minute of his stay at your delightful home."

Paul Raxon, who had staged so many unhappy scenes for the men he had enmeshed, was experiencing the unpleasing sensations of the victim. He saw very plainly that he must suffer what these men chose to inflict, and hear what they chose to say, since he had not the physical power to escape. Not idly had they sauntered into this room.

"Ah!" said Neeland Barnes, with a large gesture. "This is the little fellow I had to throw off the pier at Narragansett years ago. It was my intention to drown him as one does an unwelcome kitten, but some misguided Samaritan of the sea defeated my purpose."

Barnes had hardly finished when another entered whom Raxon recognized despite the absence of mustache and imperial as Monsieur le Viscount Raoul de Guillain.

"This is Mr. Floyd Malet," said Peter Milman. "I think you are indebted to his knowledge for ridding your house of period forgeries."

Paul Raxon rose to his feet. "This reception," he said, simulating a yawn, "grows wearisome. I seem to be a guest at a menservants' club. What is it staged for? Money? If so, there's nothing doing."

"Sit down," said Peter Milman suavely. "You will be told when to go."

THE next to enter was Sneed, who had been his own butler. Raxon saw clearly that by some ruse yet to be discovered his house had been entered by a band of confederates.

"Mr. John McKimber," Sneed announced.

McKimber took a seat near the open fire. Then he lighted a cigar and looked toward Paul Raxon.

"This is the Raxon who wished to go to the Senate," Milman explained.

"Wished!" Raxon repeated. "I'm not to be kept out of it by the fool tricks of you amateurs."

"He's trying to keep his courage up," Barnes volunteered. "He knows he's beaten. You can see it in his face; the man's white as chalk."

"One can't blame him for trying to bluff it out," Bradney exclaimed impartially. "The cornered rat invariably fights."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" Peter Milman said. "Remember that at the present minute Mr. Raxon has no idea that he is beaten. I can see him scheming a thousand plans of revenge, all of which seem reasonable because he has no idea what we hold over him."

"You don't hold anything," Raxon snarled.

"In the interest of truth I must contradict you," said his host. Milman took from his pocket a blue Manila envelope.

"I have here," Peter Milman went on, "those documents with which you threatened Mr. McKimber."

"You stole them!" Raxon snapped.

"Stole them?" Milman returned. "You pain me, Mr. Raxon. They were offered to me for sale just as they were offered to you. You bought them in the first instance; I in the second. You are not yet aware that every word of that long interview in your tower with Mr. McKimber was taken down in shorthand by an expert and transcribed. I have three copies of which the one in this blue envelope is only a carbon. One copy will be given to Mr. McKimber and the original is in the safe-deposit vault at my bank. I am afraid you were a little careless in guarding the sanctity of your home. Perhaps you will realize your mistake more fully when you hear a few paragraphs."

Raxon listened in distressed silence. There was no doubt that some one had been listening and had taken down the conversation accurately. He saw McKimber open the envelope and look at the page cut by Raxon's private detective from the register. This page, never to be replaced, together with the letters bought from relatives of McKimber's first wife, were torn into little pieces and dropped in the blazing fire.

McKimber turned upon his enemy.

"You'll get a whole lot of help from me now," he jeered.

"You daren't run for office," Raxon cried. "You've nothing on me."

Milman waved his hand warningly and turned the incipient verbal warfare to a higher level.

"I see no reason why Mr. McKimber should not go to the Senate," he said. "It may be in your own words that he has nothing on you, but we have."

"You are lying," Raxon cried rudely.

Peter Milman produced a yet larger envelope on which was a superscription in red ink.

"You shall judge," he said urbanely. "I may tell you that this embodies the work of years. It cost time and money, but it was money well spent. I have here, for example, an affidavit from Thomas Minnerly, formerly elevator boy in the studio apartment where that poor girl died. He says, under oath, that you paid him money for services the details of which are duly set forth. There is also the confession of Patrick Ford, once a well-known jockey but later a stable-hand at Pimlico, who was badly burned in a fire there and died later from the injuries. He implicates a trainer named Acheson and Paul Raxon in the plot which disgraced Neeland Barnes. And I have the testimony of Edward Nygren, who was the go-between in the matter of offering a bribe to Professor Bradney. In all, I have seven documents, each one of which will prevent your ever running for office. Do you care to see them? I dare not put them into your hands for fear that you might throw them into the fire, but Mr. Barnes will no doubt secure your arms while I show them."

Raxon waved the suggestion aside and Barnes sat down disappointed. He had almost forgotten the names Milman had mentioned. Now they came back again to haunt him.

"And there are other things," Milman went on. "Your attorney, Loddon, when heated with wine, has been more than indiscreet. I have had his conversation taken down and duly transcribed."

Raxon said no word. This man Milman whom Loddon hated had tricked him in the end. And he had tricked Loddon's master. Raxon tried to banish the fear that he knew was mirrored on his face.

"We shall see about it," he said, striving for calm. "I'm not the sort of man you can try this game on. What I know about McKimber the world shall hear of."

"Would that be wise?" Milman asked solicitously. "You see, you have no evidence. In order to give credence to your story you would have to explain the ordering of that page to be cut out. Very awkward, Mr. Raxon, as you will find, to tamper with vital statistics. That is not all. If McKimber finds you are acting against him, either directly or indirectly, he will see that the opposition papers get copies of the affidavits in this envelope. You are defeated at every point. Salvation for you lies in abandoning all political ambition."

Paul Raxon knew Milman spoke the truth. Here, definitely, once for all, was the end of his ambitions. He realized as he went down the stone steps into the avenue that he dared make no move against the men who had invaded his home and brought him low.

McKimber, sitting before the fire, felt as one might whose death sentence had been respited at the last moment. He had been told to come as though he already knew he was victor. And if he had deceived Raxon he had not convinced himself. There were tears in his eyes when Nita came in.

"My dear," he said, "you are too good for any son of mine, but if you'll marry him you'll make me happier than I ever thought to be again."

Some one put a strong firm hand on his shoulder. It was Robin.

"It's all right," said Robin gleefully. "She is going to do it."

McKimber looked up at his son and smiled.

"Robin," he said, "never forget what you owe to Mr. Milman. I can never repay him—never!"

McKimber took from his pocket a long, legal envelope. He balanced it in his hand a moment.

"It would give me great pleasure, Mr. Milman, if you would throw that on the back of the fire. It's something I want to get rid of."

"Certainly," said Peter Milman courteously. "It seems to amuse you," he added, seeing McKimber's face break into a smile.

"Do you know what you've done?" McKimber demanded. "You burned up the mortgage I hold on this house. Yes, sir, I bought it yesterday and now I can't collect."

"Really?" said Peter Milman, reddening, "I could not possibly accept such a thing; no, indeed."

McKIMBER waved his hands. "You can't help yourself. I've more to say. I've had my lawyers going through the Hazen Brewer affairs and you didn't lose all your money. There will be enough saved out of the wreck for you to live on here." For a man who prided himself on his word, McKimber lied with prodigality and fluency. "Loddon trimmed you but Brewer was honest."

McKimber turned to Bradney. He felt like a super-Santa Claus handing out presents for the deserving young.

"You may not know it, Professor, but I've a lot to say in the management of a small up-state university." He did not tell them he was its most munificent donor and chairman of the board of trustees. "We want to specialize in some one thing which will put us on the educational map in a national sense. I've suggested physics and the suggestion has been approved. I've suggested your name and that was approved, too. All you have to do is to signify your acceptance or rejection to me."

"Rejection?" Bradney cried, his eyes lighting up. "Mr. McKimber, you are offering me my career."

"As for the father of my future daughter-in-law, if he cares to run my stock ranch near Sacramento, the place is waiting for him. He can go as soon as the wedding is over. What about it?"

"Man," said Barnes earnestly, "there isn't one chance in a trillion I'll refuse." He turned to the others. "And how I hated him for the ice water he drank!"

Floyd Malet, standing in the background, saw another man reborn in the former Neeland Barnes. Not again for him would there be the life of trivial things and daily financial worries. Malet looked on the scene with no spirit of envy. That there was no place in McKimber's plans for him seemed of little consequence. Nita had won her happiness and that was enough.

He looked up as the girl came to his side.

"Dearest of my uncles," she whispered, "Do you think I don't know who gave me my Robin?" She kissed him before them all.

Peter Milman looked at them benignly. "My friend Floyd," he announced, "is going to live at his house near Florence, where he will do the great things we expect from him."

"My house?" Malet cried.

"Your house," said Peter Milman firmly. "The deed of gift will be drawn up as soon as possible. It is useless to me. I—I shall remain here." Milman looked about him. "There are some trees that cannot be transplanted and some men who die if they are uprooted." He embraced the others in his gaze. "I wish I could tell you what a different man you leave from the one who asked you to join him."

Never before had Peter Milman been so genuinely affected. The envelope upon which Raxon had looked with such horror, that envelope containing the affidavits that would forever hold him inactive, Peter Milman threw into the golden fire. McKimber saw the action too late. There was no possibility now of saving the infinitely important documents.

"Man!" he cried. "Don't you realize what you have done?"

"Better, perhaps, than you," said Peter Milman, smiling. "I have destroyed an envelope containing a dozen sheets of blank paper."

THE END

A New Serial in June

The Miracle Wagon

By Honoré Willsie Morrow

OLD documents revealed the story of Narcissa Whitman, the woman who made history in Oregon Territory. And now Mrs. Morrow has portrayed her in this epic of the '50's. "The Miracle Wagon" is absorbing, dramatic, and—best of all—it is real! Look for the first instalment of this great story of a nation in the making in

June *Everybody's* Out May 15

See Important Publisher's Announcement on page 181

The Hair of the Dog

When a Girl Sets Her Mind on Mischief, How Can You Expect a Susceptible Young Diplomat to Forestall Her?

By Arthur Mills

ALGERNON FORCET sat in the ambassadorial car outside No. 5 dock, Rio de Janeiro. Inside No. 5 dock other passengers from the R.M.S.P. *Andes* struggled with their luggage as ordinary mortals must. Some emerged from the customs hot and triumphant, got quietly into motorcars and drove to their hotels. Some lingered and greeted Algernon. But whether greeted or ignored, Algernon remained the same. Distant but urbane, his whole bearing conveyed that, now the voyage was over, relations with his fellow passengers had ceased.

Not that Algernon had been an uncongenial shipmate; far from it; he had taken an active part in organizing the sports, dressed up for the fancy-dress ball, chatted in the smoking-room with people he hardly knew, and done all in his power to contribute to the smooth running of life on board. But there the matter ended. Once on shore Algernon became again his usual exclusive self, and any imagining that because they had traveled in the same boat with him they were therefore his lifelong friends were destined to be disillusioned.

In particular, thought Algernon a little grimly, should this be so in the case of Annamae Philys Macbride—as impertinent a chit of a girl as ever he had met. She had been traveling in the captain's charge, and they had sat together at the captain's table. What Algernon had endured at the girl's hands few could guess. Openly she has mimicked his manner, his voice, his trick of polishing his eyeglass with a silk handkerchief as he came down to the breakfast table. These things he might have forgiven her, for he prided himself on a sense of humor.

But Annamae had done worse than that. Not content with ridiculing him openly, she had made fun of him behind his back. He himself had overheard her. The lese-majesty took place the morning after the fancy-dress ball. Admittedly, warmed by an Imperial pint, he had let himself go at the ball. He had frolicked and romped; he had actively forgotten his position representing his Britannic Majesty abroad. He had played hide-and-seek on the boat deck, and crawled beneath a tarpaulin with Annamae. He shuddered as he remembered the familiarity of that odious fellow Parker, who discovered them. But all the same, that was no excuse for Annamae.

He had heard her clearly! She was talking to Parker the next day.

"Him! A hard nut to crack! Why, he's soppy as milk! I'll bet you a 'monkey cup' he asks me to marry him inside a week."

"I'll take that," said Parker. "That chap's not such a fool as he looks."

That was the conversation, word for word, and from that moment Algernon walked delicately. He went no more upon the boat deck. He never played again at hide-and-seek. A joke was a joke, but some things were no jesting matter.

Anyway, whatever a "monkey cup" might be, Annamae had lost it.

Until he could find apartments, rooms had been taken for Algernon at the Gloria Hotel, an establishment which few in the world surpass for magnificence. Algernon, who reveled in luxurious surroundings, bathed, changed and descended to the restaurant in high good humor. He approached his table in his usual bland manner, head back, eyeglass fixed, seemingly unconscious of the presence of other people in the room, when suddenly he stopped, one foot in the air, and dropped his eyeglass.

AT THE very next table to his, unchaperoned, unmuzzled, in fact alarmingly at large, sat Annamae Philys Macbride.

"I did not know *you'd* be here," stammered Algernon.

She looked up, noticed his expression, and laughed.

"All right; it is my dinner I want to eat."

What transpired at dinner needs no lengthy telling. It must have been those infernal tropics again. Somehow they got to talking about moonlight drives, and Annamae made reference to a little park about a mile along the Avenida Beira Mar, whence you could see the town all lit up, and the harbor.

Forgetful of the past, Algernon agreed to accompany Annamae upon that drive.

Even at the last moment common sense should have saved him, for as they got into the car he saw standing on the steps that unpleasant fellow Parker.

Parker, of course, grinned, and Algernon knew why he grinned, and why Annamae grinned back at him; and he would have liked to pulled the fellow's nose. However, he preserved his diplomatic manner.

"What," he asked casually as they drove off, "is a monkey cup?"

Annamae slipped her hand over his. "If you are nice to me I will show you when we get back," she said softly. After which he decided she would deserve all she got.

After driving for some twenty minutes they reached a beautiful little garden, planted with palms.

"I believe this is where we ought to get out," said Annamae.

The driver was instructed to wait, and Algernon, with Annamae's cloak over his arm, led the way through the palms.

They came to a clearing. In front of them, round the bay, stretched the most lavishly lit city in the world. A great white moon shone over the harbor.

There were no seats, so Annamae spread her cloak on the grass and they sat on it.

The beauty of the scene, the really excellent dinner at the Gloria, and the bright moonlight may have had something to do with it, but it must be remembered that Algernon was now thoroughly upon his mettle. He would show that two people could play at the game of making fun of one another. He took Annamae's hand in his.

"Why is it," he asked softly, "that a beautiful piece of scenery always makes one want to have a beautiful girl with one to watch it?"

"Does it take you that way?" she asked, turning her head from him and showing the piquant profile of her face.

"Yes. I—" Algernon suddenly threw his arm round her and kissed her.

Annamae drew back indignantly, and simultaneously Algernon felt a heavy hand laid upon his shoulder.

Looking up, he found a policeman regarding him.

"*Commisario!*" said the official, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

Annamae leaped to her feet.

"What's he say?"

Algernon knew perfectly well that *commisario* meant police station. He hesitated to explain to Annamae.

The policeman pointed a relentless hand.

"*Commisario!*" he repeated.

"What is the matter with the man?" asked Annamae.

Algernon drew out his handkerchief, and started to polish his eyeglass for dear life.

"I fancy we—er—are not supposed to sit on the grass," he said.

"Well, did you ever hear that? Come on, let's get back to the car, anyway; it's no good standing talking to this mutt all night." Annamae made a step forward.

"*Commisario!*" repeated the policeman; a dark-skinned, wholly impassive official.

Algernon looked round wildly. Knowing some of the comic laws of South American republics he appreciated the gravity of the situation; providentially Annamae did not.

THE policeman showed signs of impatience; he placed his hand on his revolver holster.

"I think we had better do as he says," said Algernon, who knew that in South America the police shoot rather quickly.

The two, Annamae completely bewildered, began to walk, the policeman taking up a position between them.

"Where's he taking us to?" Annamae asked.

"The police station," said Algernon, feeling it was no good to keep up pretenses.

"For sitting on that darned grass?"

Algernon nodded. He was trying to review the situation calmly. It looked uncommonly awkward. From what the ambassador had been saying at lunch about another British subject who had been getting into trouble over "local rules" there was no chance of being able to settle the matter in a few minutes in the usual way. He could, of course, get into communication with the ambassador.

At the thought of this a cold sweat broke out. A pretty picture he would present—the first secretary to the British Embassy, on the first night of his arrival, telephoning from the police station to report that he was in custody for kissing a girl in a public park.

More chivalrous thoughts possessed him. At all costs he must get her out of it.

When they got to the road he suggested to the policeman that Annamae should be allowed to remain with the car while he went on with him to the *commisario*.

The policeman would not hear of this, and an altercation ensued. Annamae, getting the drift of the argument, chipped in.

"All right, I was sitting on the grass same as you. I'll come along."

The little procession went forward. Slowly and painfully they came out into the glare of the public highway. Persons stopped and looked at them; small boys formed up into a queue behind. Algernon, his eyeglass fixed, bore himself with dignity. His face betrayed nothing, but no words could describe his state of mind. Annamae's attitude caused him anxiety. If she made a scene at the police station it would only make matters worse. Perhaps it would be best to explain matters more fully.

"The fact of the matter is," he began—and stopped—all his fifteen years of diplomatic training inadequate to the task.

"Why, just sitting on a bit of grass like that! What's eating the man!" Annamae looked indignantly at the policeman.

"It was not that so much; it was—because he saw me—kissing you."

Annamae stared at her companion.

"Well, whose fault was that?"

Algernon felt himself growing hot again. "I—I am most awfully sorry; it—sort of came over me. I—I had often wanted to on the boat."

Annamae's eyes opened a trifle wider.

"There is only one thing I can offer to do now," Algernon continued; "wonderful luck for me; ill wind, you know," he laughed nervously.

She continued to stare at him. He thought he saw horror in her eyes, and made a last desperate effort.

"I'll marry you," he faltered.

"You'll *what?*"

"I mean," he stammered, "if anything gets into the papers; if there's a scandal."

"Thanks, I'd rather go to prison." Annamae looked round for the policeman.

The policeman had crossed the road and was talking to a civilian.

"QUICK!" said Algernon, taking Annamae's arm and running to their own car. "Gloria Hotel!" he called to the driver.

A quarter of an hour later Algernon and Annamae entered the lounge of the Gloria.

Algernon ordered a bottle of champagne.

A page came up.

"What is it?" said Algernon anxiously.

"Some one downstairs wants to speak to you, miss."

Algernon's knee came with a bump against a table, spilling half the champagne in his glass.

"I'd better go. Perhaps it is—"

"No, I'll go," said Annamae authoritatively. "You stay there." She ran out of the lounge.

She returned a few minutes later, bearing in her hand a long thin glass.

The glass held a curious-looking liquid, comprising, it appeared, a series of liqueurs, so arranged that their colors did not intermingle; on the top of all floated a fragment of Brazilian nut.

"Everything all right?" Algernon asked anxiously.

Annamae nodded. "A man I know wanted to see me a moment."

Algernon sighed thankfully, and lifted his own glass. Then he caught sight of Annamae sipping her curious concoction.

"What's that?" he asked.

"This?" Annamae tapped her glass. "Oh, it's a drink we used to call on board a 'monkey cup.' "

Meanwhile, downstairs, the odious Parker, faithfully following Annamae's instructions, paid out a sum of money to an individual disguised in the uniform of the Brazilian police.

The Pink Dress

Love Takes a Turn When a Tomboy Assumes the Rôle of a Woman

By Blanche Brace

PETER came just when the ptarmigans' wings were turning green each year, paddling the eighty miles in his canoe down rushing Keork Creek, no longer choked with ice. It always seemed to me it was Peter who brought the spring. We would see him coming while he was still only a speck on the water—for days we had been watching for his coming—and hurry down to our landing to await him.

"Peter, dear boy!" my mother would cry, and hug him hard, because he had no mother of his own. "I'm so glad you didn't forget to come!"

"Forget my best girl!" Peter would scoff, and hug her hard, too, in those big arms of his.

"Hello, stranger!" And my father would whack him on the shoulder, hungry to trade doles of stale politics and tardy news with another man. "Say, Pete, I got hold of a Seattle paper not more than a few weeks old, and it seems they've struck an oil gusher in Washington, D.C.!"

"You don't say!" Peter would grin. "Watered stock, I'll bet."

At last he would turn to me.

"H'lo, Twila! Just you wait, old girl, I'll beat you to a froth in our cross-country run this time!"

"To hear you tell it!" I would jeer.

Peter would put his arm around my mother, with my father on his other side, and we would all go to the cabin, I straggling behind the rest. Sometimes I used to wonder if Peter would have noticed me more if we hadn't known each other all our lives. Perhaps if I'd been little and pretty, if I'd worn the kind of clothes that girls wear away from the wilderness, if I'd known how to play bridge instead of how to handle a dog team, Peter might have seen that I was a girl. For years I'd been planning that sometime when he came down in the spring I was going to surprise him by wearing a dress—a wonderful dress, pink, just the shade of the far, faint banners that an Alaskan sunset flings. It was to be low-necked, without sleeves, the kind of a dress I'd never seen in all my life, except in old fashion sheets, sent up from the States.

"Peter, sometime I'm going to stop being a boy!" I told him once. "I'm going to get a dress—a pink dress!"

"Don't you do it, kid!" commanded Peter. "You suit me the way you are. I don't like girls!"

But I couldn't tell him that he didn't suit me the way he was—not liking girls and telling me so!

Through the long Alaskan winter we saw each other hardly at all. Perhaps once in the snow-muffled months his leader dog would come to a stop outside our drift-shut door. Perhaps once in two winters my dog-sled would bear me over the miles to a Lost Mountain dance. I have even walked twenty miles on snowshoes to a merry-making when I knew that Peter was to be there.

But, through the winter we saw each other seldom, and never alone. There were all the others at the dance, of course, and at home there was the family, shut in with us by the snow. Then it was my father and Peter who did the talking, speaking of many things: of politics, that subject which holds so strange an interest for men; of international news, which they read about in papers three months old; of philosophy, which father had learned in the school of the wilderness, for he had been a pioneer all his days; and of books, which Peter meant to write.

"Real books!" Peter would boast, while the wind churned the snow against the roof, and the dogs in the lean-to began to howl. "Not these modern smart little affairs, as full of epigrams as a bun is full of currants. I want my books stuffed with life, not currants!"

"How he hates to hear himself talk!" I would say. If Peter had looked at me then, he might have seen that there was some one else who liked to hear him talk, too. Peter, lost in dreams of his books, never thought to look at me.

"Good lusty tales like George Borrow's!" my father would agree, for Peter himself was not a more voracious reader. "Tales that stick to a man's ribs and stay by him on the trail, like jerked venison and strong black coffee!"

"Maybe Peter will shut us all between the covers of a book!" my mother would muse, smiling at him over her knitting. "I'll have to think whether I'd like that or not, Peter, dear. A body might feel a bit cramped, I think."

"And a body would get so little air, for who would open Peter's book?" I would tease.

IT WAS all very well for winter talk. But even better than talking was to be out in the hills together in May. The sky was so blue, without one small white cloud, that Peter would say it had forgotten its pocket handkerchief that day. Everything was full of new life, from the air that tingled with balsam to the earth that throbbed beneath our feet. Even the birds flew more swiftly, as if their wings had been frozen until now. Peter and I would kick aside the soiled patches of old drifts to see the grass-lilies trying to peck their way out through the snow.

"Come on out and see the world!" Peter would invite. "Not a half-bad little place, eh, Twila?"

"Oh, Peter, it's a beautiful world!" I would say.

In the quiet, the pale buds seemed to listen and think the matter over. I do not think that any other place in the world can be so still as our part of Alaska is in May. In winter there is the wail of the wind, the clatter of sleet, the sharp crack of snapping ice, the thud of the sliding snow. In summer the birds sing frenziedly, as if they find our brief time of sun too short for all they have to say about it. But in May our valleys hold their silences as securely as a mother holds her child.

"Isn't it wonderful to have it so still, Peter?" I sometimes said to him.

For I loved it like that. For generations my people had belonged to the lonely places of the world. My great-grandmother was a Nez Percé Indian who married an early Irish explorer down the Columbia River. There was more Indian about me, still, than just my bigness and my black braids, and the easy way I learned to weave baskets from an old Alaskan squaw, just to tease my mother, who would have liked to forget that drop of red man's blood in me. I suppose it was just that dash of Indian blood that made me so love the spacious stillness about us there.

"Isn't it wonderful to have a world all to ourselves," I said to Peter.

"What's wonderful about it?" Peter wanted to know. "I like folks, Twila. And Lord knows I need them, if I am ever going to write books about life! But this—this is just the earth and the fulness thereof, the sky and the water, without the really important part of the creation, the Adams and Eves!"

For a man who was going to write books it sometimes seemed to me that Peter was very stupid!

We didn't talk that way very much of the time. We raced, and Peter never yet had seen the time when he could reach the goal ahead of me. We tended the dogs. We amused ourselves by watching the shoals of salmon that drifted downstream, for it was the spawning season. We picked flowers, and walked long hours on end; we whistled and sang.

"Sometimes I almost wonder if you aren't a girl, Twila, after all!" Peter said, after one such merry afternoon.

Then, just to tease me, with a look of nothing more than mischief in his eyes, he leaned over and kissed me! And I boxed his ears, and laughed, because that was what he expected. But for a moment I wanted to kill him, and I wanted, myself, to die, that he should kiss me only in fun!

Then my mother called to us from the cabin, and we raced each other to the door, and went in to one of her good dinners of cornbread and dried venison and canned vegetables from the States, and toothsome dried-peach pie, and great cups of coffee. After we had done the dishes, we floated down Keork Creek in Peter's canoe, with the flaming hues of a northern sunset coming down to meet the silence on the hills. I sat still, dabbling my fingers in the cold water, and wondering if heaven could be more beautiful than our Alaskan May.

LIFE slipped by so softly there, with no need for the haste that those in cities know, that we hardly marked when one year went, and another came. Very little things were written down in our calendar of the wilderness. There was the year when the stranger stayed overnight at our cabin, on his way to the coast, and left behind him a slim little volume of poems by Christopher Morley. There was the year when my father found a thin streak of gold in one of our gray hills, and dreamed for a little while that at last he had found the pay streak that had danced before him through the years. And there was the leaden winter, one heavy day piled on another, as drift is piled on drift in our northern land, when we had no word of Peter from late October until early May.

In the sunset glow of a May day we sighted his canoe afar off as it slid down Keork Creek. We ran down to the bank and watched it come. As it drew nearer, my father and mother set up a halloo, but I made no noise at all when I tried to shout.

The canoe nosed in to the bank, and Peter sprang out and greeted us, excitedly.

"The book!" he cried. "I've brought my book! It's done, at last."

He read it to us that night as we sat around the drowsing fire, and dawn looked in at the window while we talked of Peter's book. I do not know how to tell you about it, that first book of Peter's. The people in it were the kind that I had lived among all my life, and it had not seemed to me that people should be like that, in a book. There were pictures in it that stood out as clear as northern peaks against a twilight sky.

There was a moment's silence when Peter had read the last word. Then my father whacked him on the back.

"Good work, boy!" he cried. "I'd like to hit the trail with some of those chaps of yours. They're regular old sour-doughs, those fellows are!"

"If your mother had lived till now, it's the proud woman she would have been!" said my mother, and bent over to kiss Peter, with tears in her eyes.

Peter glanced at me, and I opened my lips, but could not seem to speak.

"I'm going to take it to New York this fall," said Peter. "I shall go out on the last boat in October. It's not just to sell the book; I've wanted a winter there for a long time. If a fellow's going to write, he needs to know folks and life!"

Still I did not say anything. But I forgot that it was May, and the ice seemed to close around my heart. Peter was going away!

Then my mother spoke. There was a strange note in her voice—a little, wistful echo that I had never heard before.

"New York!" she said, and paused to smile at something far beyond us in the distance.

"All my life I've lived away from folks," my mother mused. "Why, even when I was born my mother was stark alone on an Oklahoma homestead—not another person in miles, for my father had gone on a two day's journey for the doctor. Then we took up a homestead in Washington territory, with the nearest neighbor eighteen miles away. Once when the Indians were on the rampage, the President ordered all us settlers to Walla Walla for safety while my father was away, getting the winter store of food. My mother knew that if he came back and found her gone, he'd think the Indians had killed us. So we two were left alone in all that countryside that blazed with settlers' homes that night."

A ray of pink sunlight slid into the room, then lit upon my mother's dreaming face.

"All my life I've lived away from folks," she said, again. "I haven't minded, often —the wilderness is good enough for me. Only—well, there were two things that I wanted and never got!" she ended, with a little, musing laugh.

"You never told me!" my father accused.

"Of course I didn't!" said my mother, blushing. "Such trifling, foolish little things!"

"Tell us!" we demanded, together.

"You'll laugh, you'll all laugh," my mother said, and laughed herself, once more, to show that she knew how we would feel. "Well, then—I've always wanted a pink party dress, cut low; the kind I've seen in the fashion books!"

A PINK dress! My mother had wanted a pink dress, too! I wondered if she had wanted it most in the days before my father had told her that he loved her.

"And I wanted to see a crowd just once," my mother went on wistfully.

"We'll go down in the fall with Peter," sternly said my father.

"No, no!" my mother cried, and her voice was almost afraid. "That pink dress—do you think it would fit my dreams any more than it would fit my poor old waist after all these years? And a crowd—why, I guess if I saw one on ahead now, I'd turn and run! No; I'm too old for new things now. But I want them sometime for Twila. I want to make over that pink dress I didn't have and the crowd I never saw for my girl. For years I've been saving so that when the time came I could manage the trip for her, and the clothes, and a few months in the States. Wouldn't it be fine now, if she could go on sometime while Peter is there?"

No one spoke for a minute. My father cleared his throat, getting all ready to say something and then not saying it, after all. Peter looked embarrassed and unhappy. I saw how it was: I'd be in the way; he didn't want me to go!

"No, no!" I cried in distress. "I won't!"

"Why?" asked Peter. "Why shouldn't you come with me?" His face looked surprised, and a little red, but not unhappy or embarrassed, any more. "Why, of course, that's what we'll do! You know it is: Twila's the only girl I'll ever be well enough acquainted with to want to marry. So why shouldn't we be married this fall, and go out together? That is, if Twila will?"

They were all three looking at me. Peter got up, awkwardly, and came over to where I was, and stooped and kissed me. It was a funny little kiss, just a kind of peck at my cheek, no different from those he always gave me when he'd been to visit us and was going away.

"You will, won't you, Twila?" he said.

I couldn't say anything. I just smiled at them all, those three I loved. But the ice around my heart seemed to melt, and again it was dazzling May.

"She's so young," said my mother, coming over and putting her arms around me. I wasn't young, really; it was more than two months since my twenty-second birthday. But mothers always seem to think their children are young. "Oh, Peter," she said, "I'm so glad it is you!"

"Wait a minute, now; wait a minute!" my father threw in. "She hasn't said yet that she would. Don't you let them talk you into it, Baby, unless you're sure it's what you want!"

"I'm sure," I said. "Only I don't know how I can ever bear to leave you and mother —and the dogs! But it's only for a year, of course, isn't it, Peter? We'll be back in a year?"

"If you say so," said Peter.

"I do," I told him. "Why, I couldn't breathe in the city for more than a year!"

"You'll have the pink dress!" exclaimed my mother suddenly, her eyes shining and wet. "You'll see a crowd! You'll write me all about it, won't you, Twila—every little thing?"

I HAD a hill of my own that no one else had ever seen. It lay on the other side of the high gray wall of hills behind our cabin, and some distance away, backed up against a taller hill behind it, and hidden in between two sister hills on either side. Those three bigger hills made the top of mine a little roofless tent where the first Johnny-jump-ups bloomed and the first wild strawberries ripened, and the first sunshine of spring staked its claim for the summer. I loved it. The only way to get to it without going for miles around was to take the short cut of a narrow shelf of rock that ran along the very edge of the gray wall of hills, a hundred feet above Keork Creek that foamed below. For one who wasn't sure of foot it would have been a hazardous passage, but I could have gone that way in the dark.

"Be careful, Peter!" I said, when I took him to my hill, that afternoon.

Never before had I taken any one there. Without quite realizing it, I think I had always been saving it to take Peter to, if ever he should tell me that he loved me. But my hill was wasted on Peter. He didn't seem to see it, or me, or anything nearer than the city far ahead of him, and the books he meant to write. Somehow, being engaged wasn't at all the way I'd thought it would be. It was an everyday sort of thing, already, like the people in Peter's book. Peter kept on treating me as if I were another boy. He was more excited than I had ever seen him before about our year in the city.

"Won't it be great, Twila, to stand on the corner and watch the world go by?" he cried.

"Won't it!" I agreed.

It would be great because Peter would be there. The world might go by, and welcome, so long as he stayed at my side. It was only because Peter wanted New York that I wanted it; already it seemed to me that I could not breathe when I thought of those tall buildings that would shut me away from my hills.

It was arranged that Peter was to stay on with us all through that summer—that wonderful summer before we were married, and left for the States.

"Eighty miles is too far to have to come to call on a girl," said my mother.

"And this will give you a chance to get a line on each other's dispositions," suggested my father shrewdly. "She's got a temper, I can tell you, Peter—this young wildcat of ours!"

"It's fine of you to want me, but I ought to go back to my shack, and write," objected Peter. "I must get another book on the way."

"You shall write here," promised my mother. "I'll fix you up a grand study, all your own. Twila shan't come near the door."

So Peter wrote for many hours a day, while I tried, impatiently, to help my mother sew on the clothes she was making for me. She had sent at once to Nome for patterns and cloth, for she said that I must have woman-things to wear, if I was going out into the world. So we sewed and sewed, until my father complained that he found pins in his slippers, and basting threads in the soup. Mother could hardly bear to leave that growing pile of pretty garments when bedtime came; she seemed like a little girl sewing for her dolls in her zest for the task, and her love for the soft fabrics with their tender tints. To please her, I tried to seem eager, too, but my fingers bungled at their work. It seemed a futile, almost wicked, thing to sit there pulling a thread through cloth while outdoors the sun shone and the hills were green with May. Besides, Peter did not like the things.

"Come, Peter," my mother called, when she had finished the first frock that she made for me. "There is some one out here that I want you to meet."

Peter came, looking all rumpled from his habit of pulling his hair while he wrote, and greatly bewildered, besides.

"My young-lady daughter, Miss O'Dell; I don't think you've met her," said my mother.

"Miss O'Dell," murmured Peter politely, and then I burst out laughing, and gave the joke away.

"Gosh, that's a pretty dress!" complimented Peter. "But I don't like you in it, Twila; it doesn't look like you, at all. Take it off, now, and put on your own clothes, and let's knock off for the day, and go out for a run."

"But, Peter," remonstrated my mother, disappointed that he did not like the dress she had worked so hard on for me, "Twila can't be a boy on Fifth Avenue, you know."

"All the more reason, then, for being one now," said Peter, with conviction. I thought so, myself, I'd never liked skirts; they get so in the way.

SO A month went by between working and playing, the happiest month that I had ever known. One morning in early June Peter and I declared holiday. It was one of those spring mornings, desirous and gay, when the very breeze blows in a scent of adventure.

"I feel that something is going to happen today," I said suddenly, as we went along. It seemed to me that there was a certain breathlessness about the world, as if the very hills waited for what would come that day. All at once I wanted to go back into the cabin, and shut the door upon the future.

"Women are always having feelings!" said Peter rudely. "What's going to happen, young fellow, is that you're going to be beaten in a race."

But I wasn't—not in the race that Peter meant. We ran and ran, but try as he would, Peter could only just keep even with me. Then we dropped down, panting, on a grassy bank, and picked wild strawberries for a while—tiny things, but sugar-sweet, ripening there by lingering patches of snow. Presently we ate, with huge appetite, the sandwiches that we had brought along to give our day a picnic feel.

"Now let's go to my hill!" I said, and jumped up, holding out my hand to Peter.

"You and your hill!" he mocked, getting up and stretching lazily, and started to follow me.

It was just then that, far below us, we heard a hallo, and looking down we saw a canoe on Keork Creek.

"Look, Peter! They're signaling us!" I cried. "There are women in it, Peter—white women, up here! That's an Indian guide, but I'm sure that they are women. Who in the world can they be? What do you suppose that they want?"

"It might be a good idea to go down and see," suggested Peter.

So we tumbled pellmell over the bank, and rushed precariously down to them. As we drew nearer, we saw the stolid face of the old Indian guide who sat holding the canoe skilfully poised in the stream. Then behind him we saw his two passengers: a woman propped against pillows, and tucked in rugs, who lay back with her eyes shut and her lashes very dark against the pallor of her cheeks, and at her side, leaning over to look anxiously into her face, a girl whose appearance at that moment I shall never forget. She was a little thing, very slight and small, almost like a child as she sat there. She wore a fluffy coat of soft green, its deep collar turned up around her head like a calyx, out of which looked the flower of her small, perfect face, framed in its bobbed bronze hair. She smiled at us, a frightened, childish smile..

"How do you do?" she called, in a voice that was clear and young and sweet. "Oh, I'm so glad to see you! I'd begun to think I'd never see a human being again! Tell me, is there a house anywhere near?"

"Our house is the only one within twenty miles. It's just around that point yonder," I told her, smiling back at her.

Peter didn't say anything. He just stood there with his hat off, looking bashful and queer.

"My sister's so ill," said the girl with the bronze hair. "I'm afraid to try to take her on to Nome while she's so sick. I—I don't know what to do."

Her lips quivered. Suddenly two tears slipped through her lowered lashes and slid down her cheek. She looked more than ever like a child.

"I'm so silly," she said, still trying to smile. "But it's always Beverley who looks after me. And when she's ill, you see—"

"Of course!" said Peter then, and smiled at her. His voice sounded as I had heard it sound when he talked to some of the little Indian children at the Fort.

"Of course," I echoed him. "You go right on to our cabin. My mother will love it. We don't often have company up here. It's a bit of luck for us, isn't it, Peter? I'm Twila O'Dell, and this is Peter Gray."

"It's so good of you!" faltered the girl. "My name is Ann Franklin, and my sister is Beverley Franklin—the travel writer, you know."

HER voice was proud, as she said that. I could see that she felt as Peter did, that books were the greatest things in the world. As she spoke, the woman propped against the pillows opened her eyes, and grinned at us. She had a homely, shrewd, kind face, with eyes that looked as if they had seen almost everything in the world, and yet had kept that twinkle of theirs.

"Don't ever travel, children!" she advised. "Travelers are always having hang-overs from the trip before. Look at me! Here I am in Alaska having jungle fever that I got in Africa last year, and I dare say that by next summer I'll be having Alaskan chilblains in Samoa, or somewhere else!"

We all laughed at that, and felt acquainted at once. Peter and I hurried on by the trail to the cabin, while they came in the canoe. As we went, I chattered excitedly to Peter, who hardly seemed to hear.

"Isn't it lucky, Peter, that Miss Franklin's a writer? Now she can tell you what to do about your book! And, oh, Peter, isn't she pretty, though—the little one!"

"Pretty?" repeated Peter, and his voice sounded as if he were talking in a dream. "Is she? I don't know."

Presently my mother was welcoming the visitors at our landing, and then my father and Peter were helping the sick woman into the cabin. When she had been made comfortable in bed, and had fallen asleep, my mother and I bustled about, turning Peter's study into a room for the girl with the bobbed bronze hair. Through the open door we could hear her and Peter talking, as we worked. Already Peter was telling her about his book. It was what I had wanted him to do, and yet, oddly, as I paused to listen for a moment, I felt a queer little pang.

"Idiot!" I scolded myself. "Do you want Peter to make a secret of his book?" . . .

Storms swoop with resounding fury out of the north, and it was so that I had always thought great catastrophes must come. No one had ever told me that they might settle so softly, soundlessly down, like each day's fall of the winter's snow, that one sees no need to gauge the depth until the snowflake is suddenly an impassable wall. It seems to me incredible now that during all the days of that next month I did not once guess at the thing that was to come. There was little time, it is true, for looking ahead. Two guests in a little cabin like ours means a great deal of extra work, particularly when one of them is very ill. For a time we nursed Miss Franklin day and night. There was no occasion for real anxiety, for we had plenty of quinine, and my mother was feverwise, as women of the wilderness must be, but the patient needed constant care. At first the little sister, Ann, haunted the sick room, like a small, bronze-haired ghost, hovering helplessly about the bed, with the tears always in or near her great gray eyes; but after a day or two we drove her away.

"It's like penning a butterfly in a jail!" protested my mother. "Little Ann, we'll have you sick, too, the first thing we know. Run outdoors and play with Peter for a while!"

"Peter, take Ann to see the salmon run!" I would call, or, "Peter, take Ann to pick some wild strawberries for supper!"

So they were much outdoors, and the color deepened in Ann's cheeks, and the laughter lived in her eyes. A dozen times a day I used to stare at her in amazement that any girl could be so lovely, so gay and sweet. She sang, she pouted, she powdered her nose before our embarrassed eyes, and went into ecstasies of mirth at our surprise. She petted my mother, cajoled my father, teased Peter, and talked about the latest styles with me. Her clothes, the few she had been able to crowd into their one traveling bag—old rags, Ann called them—were marvelous things. For the first time, as I looked at Ann, I was very glad that presently I, too, was going to be a girl.

"Peter's wonderful, isn't he?" said Ann, more than once. "And isn't he good-looking, Twila, in that big black way of his? Um-m-m! And don't you think his book's a beautiful thing?"

My cheeks glowed with her praise of him. Of course, I had always known that every one would think that he was wonderful—my Peter! But it pleased me that Ann, so much finer and rarer than others, should appreciate Peter at his true worth.

The fever broke, and Miss Franklin grew better, day by day. Propped high on her pillows, she lay there and brought the world into our little Alaskan cabin with her entrancing stories of the lands she had seen. We saw the camels faced toward the desert as they set out from Oran with the great mosque behind them; glimpsed the gleaming jewels in the shining windows along the Rue de la Paix, floated in a gondola down the Grand Canal; drank Turkish coffee, thickly sweet in a little outdoor café in Constantinople.

"I've been to cities now! I've seen the world! I know what crowds are like!" exclaimed my mother, listening breathlessly.

Now that Miss Franklin was better, Ann brought Peter to read his book to her, a chapter at a time. When he had read it all to her, she gave her verdict: it was crude in places, it needed going over again, but it was full of originality and of promise, and there was little question of its success. I slipped away from the others that day, and went alone to my hill.

SO THE happy, crowded days flew by until at last there came the night of the Lost Mountain dance. Ann made us go. More radiant than ever now that her sister was getting well, forever laughing, bent upon her own way like a child, she gave us no rest until we had promised.

"Fifteen miles by canoe! A five-mile hike on top of that!" cried Ann. "Oh, I *want* to go! I never *have* been to a dance in Alaska. You say there will be Indians there, too? Oh, Peter, you'll take us, won't you—Twila and me?"

Peter teased her for a time, refusing just for the fun of having her coax him, and then, laughing at her italics, he said that of course he would take us if we wanted to go. Ann talked about it constantly for a week. She couldn't have been more excited if she had been going to be presented at court—as she had been, her sister told us, three years before. That was the nicest thing about Ann: all the traveling she'd done, all the places she'd visited, all the wonders she'd seen, hadn't spoiled her at all for little things. She was still like a little girl who regarded life as a Christmas stocking, everything in it a gay present for her.

"Won't it be fun, Twila!" she cried, a dozen times an hour. "Oh, I can hardly wait for the night to come! I wish I had a new dress to wear!"

We all gasped when the evening came, and Ann came out, ready to start for the dance. She wore a filmy dress of spangled white, that might have been made of the spray of a northern waterfall. Her white, slim shoulders were bare. On her feet were little silver slippers, and over her arm she carried a silver cloak. We cried out with delight at the sight of her.

"Oh, do you like me?" asked Ann, flushing with joy. "But, Twila, you aren't ready! You haven't changed your clothes! Don't tell me that we aren't going, after all! Oh, I just don't want to *live* if we don't go!"

"Of course we're going," promised Peter, who had not once taken his eyes off her since she entered the room. "They couldn't have a dance without you, Ann!"

"I'm ready," I explained. "This answers for a ball gown up here. It's the fashionable thing to wear, in fact! You'll be the one that is out of style in that lovely dress!"

Ann looked alarmed. "But, Twila, if you don't wear an evening dress, I can't," she protested. "And I *want* to—I haven't had one on since we left the boat! Wear one, Twila, to please me!"

"It can't be done, even to please you!" I laughed at her. "I can't wear what I haven't got!"

"Then be an angel and wear Beverley's!" insisted Ann. "It would fit you, I know. Such a pretty dress, Twila—pink! Do wear it, please!"

Miss Franklin called from her room.

"Do wear it, to please the child!" she urged. "You'll spoil it? You'll do me a real favor, then, for in that dress I look like a beet masquerading as a rose. Ann's fault! She would have me get it to wear on the boat. But even Ann doesn't go so far as to say it's becoming to me. Wear it, Twila, and welcome."

"I'd like to see how you look in a pink dress," my mother said wistfully.

And so it came about that at last I was putting on the pink dress of my dreams. My fingers shook, as I slipped it over my head. If I'd picked it out myself, with all the dresses in the world to choose from, it couldn't have been any more like the dress I'd had in my heart so long. It was of clinging, silky stuff, with draperies of net as fragile as a sunset cloud. It was cut low, without any sleeves, and with straps of brilliants over the shoulder. A dress for a great lady who was also beautiful and young—but was it a dress for Twila O'Dell? But I put it on with eager, shaking fingers, and tried to see myself in the little square of blotched mirror in my room.

"It's just as if you'd stepped out of one of the fashion books!" cried my mother.

But Miss Franklin shook her head. "Child, what have we done to you?" she asked.

"Hurry, Twila!" called Ann from the other room before I could ask what Miss Franklin meant. "I don't want to miss a single minute of it! Peter says we must pin up our dresses, and put old coats over them, and carry our slippers, and wear boots for the hike!"

IN THE big cracked mirror of the little dressing-room in the old hall, I came with a start of surprise upon an alien girl, whose face was swarthy and dark over the fairy clouds of pink that she wore, whose bare shoulders were ugly and thin, and whose hands dangled red and big at the end of her uncovered arms.

"Who is she?" I wondered, and then it came to me with a pang, "Why, that's me!"

"Ann!" I cried in consternation. "I don't look right! "I shouldn't have worn this dress, Ann!

Ann, as exquisite as a grass lily with the morning dew on it, laughed at me.

"It's because you're not used to dresses, Twila, you darling idiot!" she said. "Powder your nose, and you'll be all right."

So I powdered my nose, and went out to Peter. All the way to Lost Mountain I had dreamed how Peter would look when he saw me in the pink dress. He would look at me as he had looked at Ann.

Now Peter was looking at me, but not as I had dreamed that he would. He looked at me as if I were a girl that he had never seen before, and felt sure that he was not going to like. I could see all my swarthiness, my awkwardness, my ugliness reflected in his eyes more clearly than they had been reflected in the dressing-room mirror.

"You don't like my fine borrowed feathers!" I laughed to hide my hurt.

"They're very grand," said Peter, politely. "Had I better dance the first one with Ann, since she doesn't know any one else here?"

The pink dress or the look in Peter's eyes, or both of them together, spoiled the dance for me. Parties are so few in our northern land that we know how to make the most of them. Never before had I failed to find such an occasion altogether rollicking and gay. More than once in my knickers and my old flannel shirt I have felt while the dance lasted like an enchanted princess in an old fairy tale. Tonight in that beautiful dress I felt like an alien ugly thing upon which some malignant spirit had cast an evil spell. Dancing was not the free and joyous thing that it had always been with those long skirts twisting about my ankles. A sense of foreboding weighed my spirits as the draperies weighed my feet.

"Oh, Twila, aren't you having a heavenly time!" laughed Ann, as she paused near me, breathless and shining-eyed. "I am—the time of my life! I wish this dance would never end!"

It seemed to me that it never would end. It dragged on interminably hour after hour, while I danced and laughed and talked, like a girl in a nightmare dream. What I wanted was to creep away from the crowd, the music and the lights, out into the quiet night. And I longed with an intense longing to be at home where I could take off the pink dress, and lay aside with it the sense of impending disaster that filled my heart.

"Don't be an idiot, Twila O'Dell!" I told myself with scorn. "Why, nothing's the matter, after all! Nothing's really wrong!"

It wasn't any use. Presently I slipped away from the others, and went outside to a shadowy corner of the big porch, to be alone for a little while. It was very peaceful out there, the air soft and cool. I stood listening to my partner call my name, inside, and to the bars of a two-step, lilting and gay! Just at first I did not notice that I was not alone on the porch, and then, at the other end, I saw two people standing close together, a girl and a man. It was after midnight, but in our northern summer the daylight lingers almost through the night, and I saw that the girl was Ann, and that the man was Peter. Something held me back from calling to them. They weren't saying anything, either, just standing there with Peter looking down at her. Suddenly Ann laughed, an odd little shaken laugh.

"Why, Peter!" she gaily jeered. "Don't you know that it's rude to stare?"

"I'm sorry," said Peter, gravely, his voice husky and queer. "But it's your fault, Ann! You are so beautiful tonight!"

"I didn't know you were interested in the modes!" laughed Ann. Then all the tender mockery left her voice. "I'm glad you like me, Peter!" said Ann, very low, but not too low for me to hear.

"*Like you!*" cried Peter. "*Oh, Ann!*"

ANN'S hand stole toward his, in answer to the hunger in his voice, and Peter's hand went out to meet it. But suddenly as he touched her white, little hand, Peter's drew back again. There was an instant's startled silence, while Ann looked up at him.

"Ann," asked Peter, his voice dragging on the words, "you know about Twila and me, don't you? You know that we are to be married before we go to New York in the fall?"

Ann shrank back from him. Something about the gesture made me think of a wounded fawn that does not understand what has hurt it, or why it is hurt. Her eyes were still lifted to Peter's and I could see the grieved astonishment in them. Then Ann's bobbed bronze head was lifted, her small chin squared.

"Of course I knew it, Peter!" she lied. "It will be so nice to see you and Twila there! Ought we to go in? We're missing a wonderful two-step, you know!"

We were all very silent as we went home in that queer twilight that comes just before dawn in the northern land. Now and then Ann repeated in a gallant little voice that tried to be gay that she had had the time of her life. Peter did not speak at all, as his paddles swiftly parted the water. I sat still, too, with my eyes fixed dully upon the gleaming path of phosphorus behind us—the shining trail to the happiness that we had left behind.

It was something to be at home, again, and to take off the pink dress, though I saw now that I could not lay aside the trouble it had brought me. I went to bed, and lay hearing, through the thin partitions, Ann crying very softly to herself, like a tired child that does not understand why it has been punished. But I was not sorry at all for Ann—Ann who had so much, while I had only Peter! I hated her when I thought of that hunger in Peter's voice. What right had she to think she loved him? She wasn't Peter's kind and he wasn't hers! Peter would forget her fast enough, if he never saw her again!

So all through the night I lay there hating Ann. The next morning after breakfast Ann came to me, pale with dark rings under her wide gray eyes, and a pitiable smile on her lips.

"Don't be busy, Twila!" she begged. "Come for a walk with me!"

"Get Peter to take you," I said, with stiff lips.

For a moment the brave smile left Ann's face.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "I want you, Twila! Won't you show me your hill? Peter told me that you have one of your own."

So Peter had told her about the secret hill, the hill that only he of all the world had shared with me! Our hill, where we had gone on the day that Peter had asked me to marry him! Black rage seized me, as I looked at her.

"All right," I said. "We'll go to my hill."

I looked at Ann's skirts, of a soft, knit rose, too long to walk in easily; and at her little shoes, thin-soled, too high of heel, dangerous shoes for that trail.

"Ready now?" I asked her.

Cold wrath filled my heart as we set forth for my hill. I led her toward that perilous short cut which I always used. Ann stopped short when she saw the narrow shelf of rock over which she must go.

"Afraid?" I asked, and I heard with a kind of surprise the sneer in my voice. "There's a longer way that we can go if you are."

Ann's bronze head went up, as it had done the night before.

"I'm not afraid!" she answered.

"I'll go first," I offered, in that same tone that did not seem like my own.

Ann's head was lifted higher. "Pooh! Who's scared?" she laughed. "I'll go first, Twila! Follow me!"

HER step was light and sure as she began her perilous passage. She walked on and on, with her quick, deliberate tread, never hesitating for a moment. Once she even looked back and smiled at me over her shoulder, and a mist of madness swam before my eyes. Now she had safely covered half the distance that she had to go. At last without warning her steps began to falter, she swayed for a moment on that rocky shelf, and then without a sound she toppled over the precipitous edge. In that moment I knew that it was I who had pushed her to almost certain death, not with my hands, but with the whole strength of my heart and mind and soul!

Suddenly the black cloud of wrath before my eyes dissolved, the tight band of rage about my brain gave way, and the bitterness of my heart was gone. All that was left was the terrible fear that Ann was dead, and it was I who had killed her! With a cry of horror, I knelt and peered down over the rim of that wall of rock. God had made a miracle happen for me! Ten feet below Ann lay caught by the arm of a little stunted fir, a thinly rooted tree that threatened to give way even beneath her slender weight.

"Ann!" I cried in terror. Ann!"

Ann looked up and smiled at me. There was something that tore at my heart about Ann's smile—her gay little smile of everyday. I knew then what I must try to do.

"I've done it now!" said Ann.

"Don't try to move!" I called. "I'm coming down to you!"

Ann did move then, a quick little frightened twist that all but tore the small fir tree from its precarious place.

"No, no!" cried Ann, her voice shrill, the smile quite wiped from her face. "Twila, don't! You'll fall and be killed! You must think of Peter first!"

I knew then how Ann loved Peter. She had seemed weak to me, little Ann, but she loved him with a love that was stronger than mine, a love that did not falter at the very point of death, a love that even at that moment put him before herself. I shut my eyes, and swung myself over the rocky shelf.

"Lie still! Don't move!" I called again. "I'm coming now!"

Inch by inch, fighting for foothold in the rock, clinging to projecting bits of stone with torn and bleeding hands, slipping, half falling and catching myself again, I made my way down to her.

"Put your arms around my neck and hold tight!" I commanded. "I'm going to carry you on my back."

"You can't possibly do it!" sobbed Ann, struggling with me as we swung there in the air. "I'm too heavy! We'll both be killed! Oh, Twila, go on without me!"

"Don't be such a baby! Don't be such a coward!" I berated her.

That worked, as I had hoped. Ann glared at me, and put her arms around my neck. We started on again.

A hundred times it seemed to me in that awful hour that followed that the effort was too great to be borne. My very soul was torn and exhausted. It would be bliss not to fight any longer, just to loose my hold and fall. But there was Ann—Ann whom I had pushed over the cliff—Ann whom Peter loved. Ann. So I struggled on through what seemed an eternity, an eternity in hell for the sin of having wanted Ann to die.

I did let go at last, but not until the green bank of Keork Creek was just beneath my feet. It was Ann who crept back to the cabin to bring my father and Peter to my aid. They carried me home, and my mother put me to bed, where through all the rest of that day and that night I lay in the deep sleep of exhaustion. It was dawn when I awoke and, going to my window, looked out upon a world dewy and still and radiant-clear. All the fogs in my mind had blown away, and I knew with certainty now what I must do; just as Ann had said, I must think of Peter first.

THEY were all in the kitchen, my father and mother, and Peter, when I went out to tell them, all three. It seemed to me that it would be easier than telling Peter alone. I had waited until I thought of the way to say it.

"You'll have to let me off," I told him. "I'm sorry, Peter, dear!"

"Why, Twila, I don't know what you mean!" said Peter. But I had seen the quick flare of hope in his eyes.

"I mean I can't leave them—mother, and dad, and the dogs, and my hills," I explained. "I mean that I can't marry you, Peter."

"But, Twila, see here!" urged Peter, wretchedly, and yet I could see that he was holding himself back from relief. "Don't you love me, Twila?" It was the first time that he had ever spoken that word to me.

"No, Peter, I don't—not that way," I told him.

And I didn't. I didn't love him the way that would have made me cling to him when he wanted to be free. Yesterday I had loved him like that, but now I had found another way.

"But, Twila—" remonstrated Peter, but his eyes were suddenly happy again.

"Why, daughter, aren't you making a mistake?" asked my mother, half in sorrow and half in joy that we were not to be parted, after all.

"You let Twila alone, both of you!" spoke up my father. "I won't have her talked into anything that she doesn't want! Twila knows her own mind!"

Ann's ankle had been badly hurt by her fall, and she stayed in bed that morning. By and by I took her breakfast in to her, and, while she ate it, I told her about Peter and me. I didn't look at her as I talked—not sure that I could meet that clear gaze of Ann's—but I saw the color come back to her cheeks, and the shine to her eyes.

"Why don't you go in and read to Ann?" I said to Peter, after a little while. "She ought to be entertained. She's company, you know!"

I didn't look at Peter, either, yet I saw the joy in his face. He went in to read to Ann. I hurried away to my hill. . . .

That was two years ago. The pink dress still hangs on my wall, for Miss Franklin gave it to me after I wore it as Ann's bridesmaid. It looks odd hanging there, a little limp but still lovely, among my old flannel things.

It is spring again. The grass-lilies are just beginning to peck their way out from the snow. Strange that it can be spring, when Peter is not here!

Unhappy? No. Sometimes I take his book, with the little bookmark picture of their baby that Ann sent to me, away to my hill. And, sitting there, I feel the sunshine warm my heart.

Black and White Magic

Love Has Its Ups and Downs in a Marriage That Combines Spanish Jealousy with American Suspicion

By Edwina Levin MacDonald

Illustration by Harley Ennis Stivers

PATRICIA was not a beauty, but her widely spaced blue eyes, generous mouth and ungenerous nose, together with hair the color of corn silk gave her the look of a Dresden shepherdess, most engaging.

Thus Mrs. James Darcy Warren, one of the leaders of Park Avenue's young matrons, after consultation with Pat's mother, decided that Pat, having emerged from the short skirts of a rather headlong flapperism to the restrictions of long skirts, ought to do rather well for herself in Palm Beach. For, be it known that Palm Beach is famed as a hunting ground for impoverished society girls, and is a place of great danger for unattached fortunes. The air is insidious—like the brushing of velvet lips against the cheek. The moon is provocative, an insistent invitation to idle masculine arms. The rustle of palm fronds stirs age-old memories of love in a jungle garden, before man learned to flee from woman.

And but for the presence of a young man from Tampa with ardent black eyes, distinctly Castilian features, a flashing smile, and a modest manner, there can be no doubt that the spell of the tropic sea together with Patricia's impertinent loveliness would have worked Mrs. Warren's will.

Don Talbott was a charming boy who admitted that he "made cigars." He had his own place. But he was interested in Pat, not in his personal achievements; and Pat having attained the age of discretion through twenty years of life in a world stripped of romance by a sophisticated generation, herself having no illusions, elected to marry for love. Don assured her that nothing else mattered. He even told Mrs. Warren that he was determined to kill himself if Pat refused him, which would be too bad, seeing that his mother and sisters were quite dependent upon him.

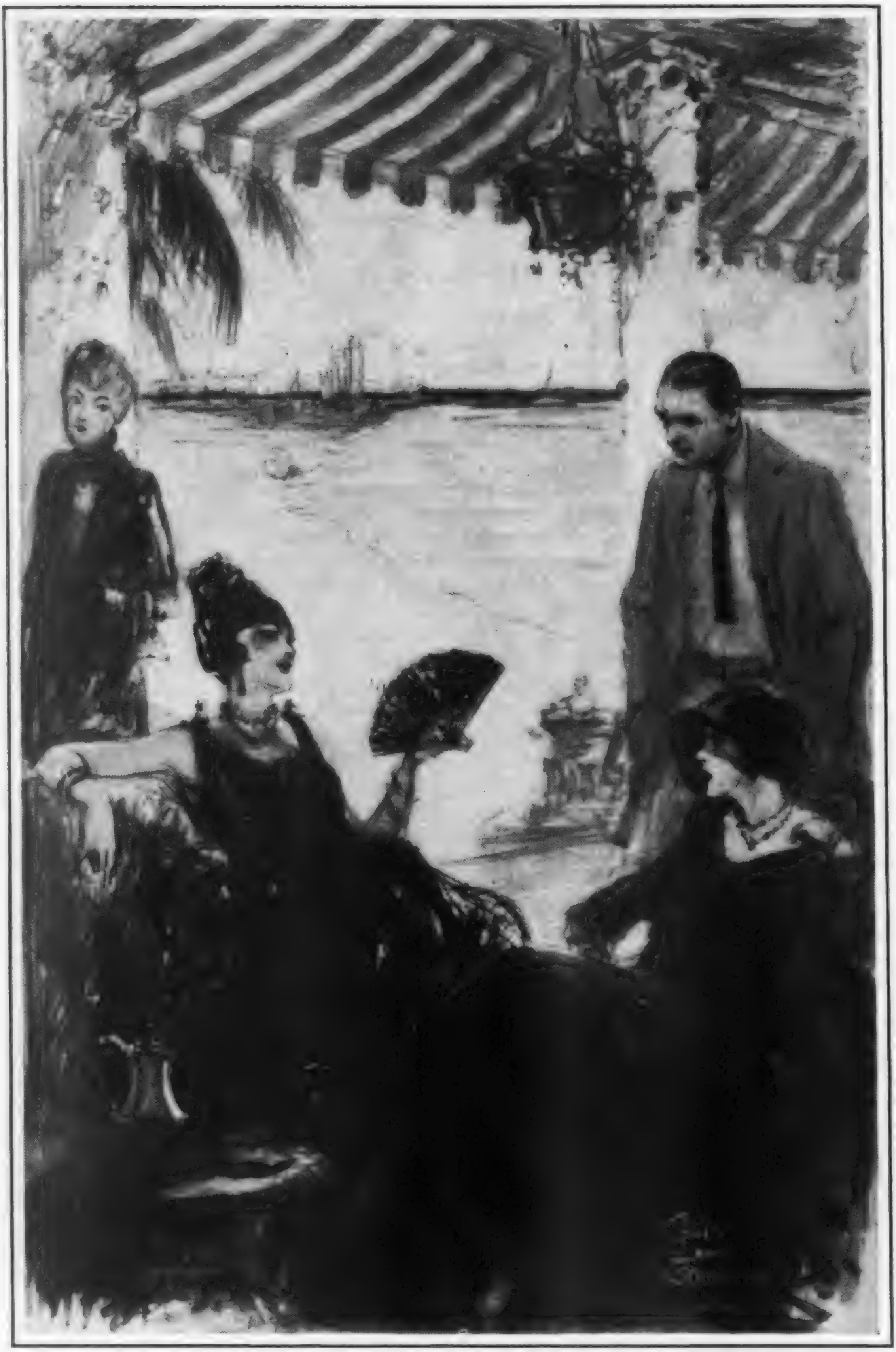
When it developed that Pat's twenty-two-year-old husband's "cigar stand," as Mrs. Warren had dubbed it, was rated at some forty million dollars Pat felt a most human urge to crow. But at the moment of Pat's discovery Mrs. Warren was cruising in the Mediterranean, and so Pat contented herself with watching her new home rise in red brick on the Bay Shore, and driving in her $17,000 car, always attended either by Don, or by his mother or one of his five beautiful sisters, who initiated her into the gay and exclusive Spanish society of Tampa and Ybor City.

Now Pat had been wont, if the notion took her, to wander at will about the streets of New York unattended, and the preference Don's family showed for her society began to weary her.

One day her never too patient temper erupted. "Don, what's the idea of your family tagging me everywhere? Have they gone nutty about me?"

"You are so beautiful, my darling," he replied ardently, "it would not do for you to go about alone."

PAT'S stare, at first blank, changed to incredulity, amazement, then to blue flame. "Do you dare to tell me that you have set your folks to watch me?"



Maria was very cordial, but her sweetness was iced. Only when she addressed Don did her voice take on its liquid warmth.

Instantly he had her in his arms. "No, my darling. No. I have the most perfect faith in you. You are an angel, and I adore and trust you as never man trusted woman. But men I do not trust. These Spaniards—they are so—how shall I say?—impulsive; so enthusiastic where a pretty woman is concerned."

He pointed out to her that the men of Tampa—that is, the Latin element—were not creatures of fish's blood like American men. She did not know them. He did. And never had Tampa beheld such loveliness, such charm as she possessed. She was in great danger. Vultures lay always in wait to devour such fairness. He was her husband. It was his duty to protect her. He dare not give his friends the smallest opportunity to approach her, and so force him to commit murder.

"Do you mean that you told your mother and sisters to tag me the way they are doing?" stormed Pat.

"Oh, no, my darling! I would never do such a thing. I merely said to my mother quite privately: 'Pat is very beautiful and very innocent, mother.' My mother is a woman of perception. She understood."

Pat wriggled in his arms. The thought of espionage was outrageous. But, having long believed herself to be merely pretty, in a fair insolent fashion, the idea of a loveliness so surpassing rare that it must be guarded, amazed her, also it was rather pleasing. The picture of herself, a dazzling figure in Franklin Street followed by throngs of gasping, admiring men, of a dark desperate husband of twenty-two committing wholesale murder for love of her, fascinated her. That she was too "innocent" to protect herself against an impulsive and enthusiastic masculinity amused her vastly. Moreover, Don's arms were most thrilling at the moment; his black eyes devouring, pleading, humble. She giggled with delight.

"But, Don, you can't make your family guard me forever."

"It will not be necessary," he whispered, pressing her close. "Soon you will have a family to occupy you. You will have no time to run about at all hours of the day, and by the time you are through with the children, you will be too old to ensnare men with your beauty."

Pat gave way to unrestrained mirth. "I may not have a family," she laughed. "Everybody doesn't."

"Every dutiful wife does," he said coldly. Then his warmth returned: "You, my darling, expect to give me sons and daughters, do you not? You want them, as I do?"

Pat blushed. "Of course, Don, I adore children, and—want them—after a while."

His engaging smile flashed out. "It is enough. Kiss me, beautiful temptress."

She held him off. "But, Don, your family may not like this tagging business any better than I do."

"A man's women-folk do not question his will," said Don sternly. "My mother and sisters like what I like."

"Well," said Pat, stiffening, "if you think that you can make a door-mat of me, and that I won't question your will—"

"You are my queen," he declared. "I have no will with you. I am your slave. I command you to kiss me. Women like you were made to kiss, not to argue with."

Thus Pat, half reluctant, half flattered, adjusted her wild young viewpoint to the idea of the "vigilante," as she called Don's mother and his five sisters.

A SHOCKING affair in Ybor City, which is the Latin quarter of Tampa, brought her face to face with another phase of the Latin mind. A man, notorious as a Beau Brummel, had shot a friend suspected of admiring too obviously his wife, and had gone home to be received with open arms by his wife.

"I'd like to see myself stick to such a husband!" exclaimed Pat in discussing the affair with her mother-in-law. "The old reprobate! He had his nerve."

Mrs. Talbott shrugged. She was a large stately woman with white hair and sad black eyes. "Men are like that, my dear, always chasing off after bright-colored bubbles that explode, once possessed, and coming back home for sympathy and comfort."

"I wouldn't think he'd have had the face to go home," said Pat indignantly.

"Where else could he go? Minna had been most foolish."

"I don't blame her for getting revenge on him," declared Pat hotly, "and he ought to be hung for resenting it."

Mrs. Talbott smiled sadly upon this evidence of inexperience.

"For a Spaniard's wife to indulge in this form of revenge is to make herself responsible for a grave, my dear."

"Do you mean to tell me that it is *customary* for Spanish men to flirt with women, then kill men who flirt with their wives?"

"If they discover it. A woman must preserve the sanctity of her home, whatever her husband does. If not, then he must defend it in a man's way. What would you, my child? Society would fall apart, otherwise."

Pat was amazed. She thought the world had outgrown the double standard.

That evening she gave Don the result of her meditations. "A Spaniard's wife has no resource, it seems, but to kill the woman who flirts with her husband. If you ever go to chasing bubbles, old dear, I'll just have to kill the bubble, won't I?"

A startled expression leaped into his dark eyes. "Why, my darling! Whatever put such an idea into your pretty head?"

She related to him her conversation of the morning with his mother. With a look of relief he folded her in his arms and covered her small fair face with kisses.

MR. DON TALBOTT sat in unaccustomed aloneness at a small table in the Spanish Club, sipping an iced drink. He nodded constantly to friends; but his brooding eyes issued no invitation to them.

Presently a waiter approached him. "Some one wishes to speak to you on the telephone," said the man in Spanish.

Don rose with evident reluctance. "Mr. Talbott speaking," he said curtly into the receiver.

A liquid voice answered him. "This is Maria."

An expression of annoyance swept his face, but his tones were gracious. "Ah, there is something I can do for you, Madam Surez?"

"You are angry with me." There were tears in her voice. "You address me Madam Surez. Ah, how can you be so cruel to one who—" She broke off as if fearful of saying too much.

His eyes softened. "You know I have only the most kind thoughts for you, little Maria. But my wife, I fear, has been hearing that—I am polite to you."

"She has said something?"

"Yes. Not much. It sounded innocent enough, but I have been thinking it over, and I fear it may have been a hint."

"But you and my husband were good friends. What harm can there be if you are polite to the widow of your poor dead friend? Besides, you are a man, are you not? A man cannot be forever dangling on a string drawn by his wife. You have eyes to admire a pretty woman, and a heart which must warm to her. Is it not so?"

"Quite so. But this is a thing my wife cannot understand. She is not of the Latin temperament."

"And you are afraid of her?" The liquid voice was faintly contemptuous. "You are a man; yet you fear to do as you will."

"I do not fear. But I love her," he said coldly. "I will only to make her happy."

"Forgive me." The voice was soft and very sad. "I pray the Holy Mother to send me such a love."

Don's heart went out to her. "You are young and beautiful. Many men must be eager to love you as you wish."

"It is true," she admitted with a sigh; "but I do not want them. If one could but love as one willed!"

Don understood. The knowledge that Maria Surez, the young widow of his dear friend, loved him, had come to him some three months after his marriage, one eveing at the club dance. The night being warm, he had stepped out on a balcony with Maria for a breath of air. They were sitting on the balustrade in the enveloping shade of a bougainvillea vine, when all at once she began to cry. Thinking he had in some way offended her, he took her hands and under the stress of his masculine will she confessed the truth.

He was shocked.

Love comes, no man knows whence: not a thing of the head, but of the heart; never shameful; always beautiful and glorious. And to be loved by two women such as his own darling Pat and the exquisite Maria! Ah, it was a divine gift. By way of showing his gratitude to the good God who gave it, and his sweet pity for Maria, he took her in his arms and kissed her very gently upon the forehead. Whereupon she flung her arms around him and clung to his lips with a passion both sweet and painful.

He had been most careful thereafter not to see her alone. But certainly there could be no harm in dropping in at her pretty home occasionally for a cup of good Spanish coffee—especially with Maria's mother always present—since one could not get such a cup at the hotel in which one lived with one's wife. For his own part, preferring to have his afternoon cup with his wife, he had taken her to Novedades' on several occasions; but she could not drink Spanish coffee and she did not like Novedades', with its flaming posters around the walls, its green or pink dust always sprinkled over the oily black floor, its crowds of foreign-visaged men chattering in a strange tongue over coffee cups, and enveloped in clouds of smoke.

Thus it appeared, as always, that there were pleasures which a man could not share with his wife. To forego his afternoon coffee was not a requirement of fidelity. And certainly it was more pleasant to take it in company with a friend; still more pleasant with a beautiful woman who asked only the joy of one's society.

"You are coming over for your cup of coffee, are you not?" said the soft voice over the telephone.

"I—Maria, I will come over this once more, because I must talk with you; but it is the last time."

"As you will, my friend."

MARIA turned from the telephone to her mother, who waited beside her. "He is coming for the last time," said Maria. And she swiftly repeated the conversation. Whereupon she began to weep.

"If only I had not been in mourning when he went to Palm Beach I might have had him." She was very small, and very dark with large velvet eyes and a birdlike alertness of manner.

Though but seventeen she had been a wife, was now a widow, and skilled in intrigue; yet she was ready to give up.

"Little fool!" said her mother, a big woman with beetling brows, a dark mustache and heavy jaw. "Don't make your eyes red by weeping. You can still have him if you play your cards well. This pale-faced creature who was married to him by a magistrate has no real claim on him. A man must have his little affairs of the heart. They mean nothing. If he cannot have a woman as he wills, then a magistrate must assist him. And a magistrate can easily undo what he has done."

"But he loves her," sobbed Maria.

"Bah! Love! It is a snare of the devil. You loved Carlos and he left you with this house and nothing to live on. Once you are Don Talbott's wife he will love you. A man always loves his true wife. And when he selects his real mate, he does not lead her to a magistrate. I know men, my child."

"He will never leave her," said Maria, nevertheless looking up hopefully.

"She will leave him. These American women are great fools. They run to the divorce courts. You have but to compromise him."

"If he will come no more to see me—"

"A man always thinks he will come no more when he is frightened. Do not try to persuade him. Agree. Always agree with a man if you would convince him. Let him go. A sad farewell. I will see that you have a chance. But no hysteria. That will send him away forever. Tears and smiles. A brave yielding to his judgment. Then, when his fears have subsided, recall him. Some excuse which will not arouse his suspicion. Soon you will be back into the old way. Man's downfall is his tendency to drift. Trust me for the rest."

Maria smiled through her tears. Her mother was very wise.

THE young Talbotts had moved into their new home: a two-story red-brick house with tall white pillars, encircling verandas, and gabled roof, overlooking the blue waters of the bay. Already poinsettias flamed against the white woodwork of the rambling foundation, and an avenue of young royal palms waved long graceful fronds over the terraced walk that led to the shore drive.

Pat was happily absorbed with the furnishing of the spacious high-ceilinged rooms when one afternoon, on her way to a curio shop in Ybor City, she saw Don's roadster parked in front of a pretty cottage. As she slowed down Don came out, followed by a lovely Spanish girl and a dragonlike woman. His back was to the street and he lingered in lively conversation with the two women. Pat drove on wonderingly.

That evening at dinner she remarked that she had tried to reach him at his office and at the club around four o'clock to look at a vase she wanted to buy. He flushed, saying that he had probably dropped in at

Novedades' for a cup of coffee. He was there from about three to four-thirty.

"Don, that's a lie," she retorted. "I know where you were."

Don pushed back his chair and without a word left the house. When he came home the following evening Pat apologized with a humility which would have surprised Park Avenue.

Don, also chastened by a night away from her, proceeded to explain Maria and her mother.

The least he could do to show his sympathetic regard was to drop in now and again for coffee. The lie he had told? Well, he hardly knew why he had done that. Perhaps an instinctive fear that she might not understand. He had heard that American women were most narrow and prudish as regards their husbands' rights. He had not meant to lie—did not want to lie to her ever. But he adored her so that he would even lie to keep her happy.

Pat, in terror of his falling into such mistakes, assured him that she was not narrow. If he wanted to drop in to see his friend's widow occasionally she saw no harm in that, and no reason why he should feel obliged to lie about it.

He was charmed, overwhelmed by this new view of his love, and prostrated with grief that he had debased her by suspecting her of petty jealousy. He begged her forgiveness and promised always to tell her the truth in the future. They kissed and wept and forgave each other.

THE following week Pat asked her husband to take her to call on his friends. He did so.

Maria had been prepared by Don for Pat's visit. Both were dressed with the care rivals accord each other. Pat in a jade-green frock with coral necklace, touches of coral on her shoes and her hat, her pale gold hair carefully netted to take care of a growing bob, sat very dignified, a Dresden shepherdess trying to appear grown up.

Maria, in flame silk, her black hair piled high against a garnet comb, was like one of those brilliant bisque dolls that come from the Orient. Three years Pat's junior, the product of a guarded womanhood, she was old in wisdom where Pat was a pretentious child.

Maria was very cordial, but her sweetness was iced. Only when she addressed Don did her voice take on its liquid warmth. She and Don had apparently many topics in which Pat had no part. Madam Dominquez talked in a harsh masculine voice, letting drop hints from which Pat gathered that there was great intimacy between the three—an intimacy which at least two of them had no intention of letting her share.

She went away with a nameless hurt in her heart.

"Well," asked Don in high spirits when they were in their car, "what do you think of them? Are they not charming?"

Her blue eyes clouded. She could not bear to disappoint him. He was so obviously glad to have her meet them. "I do not care for Madam so much," she said, "but Maria is very beautiful."

He turned to her with his flashing smile. "I wonder how many beautiful women would be so generous to another?"

"I am not beautiful, Don," she said in a low voice, "—not as Maria is beautiful."

He brought the car to an abrupt stop in the middle of the street. "Who says you are not so beautiful as Maria?"

"I do."

An outraged honking behind him forced him to start his car. "That," he said, "is because you do not see yourself. Maria is like the flaming hibiscus, beautiful, but here"—he shrugged his shoulders—"in Tampa one sees her on every corner. She is the Spanish type—lovely, but plentiful. You are like the night-blooming cereus—seen once in a century."

"Don, you *are* silly," laughed Pat, greatly comforted.

"It is not proper for a wife to call her husband silly unless she can prove it. Where in Tampa—in all of Florida—can you find me one woman who has hair like pure gold, eyes like—"

"The sky," she broke in gaily.

"I was going to say turquoise. But the sky is more expansive and original."

He was so obviously sincere that Pat could no longer feel jealous of the lovely Maria.

MARIA and her mother called one afternoon when Pat was out, and there the courtesies rested.

Pat, meanwhile, holding women in contempt who quizzed their husbands, and desperately afraid of losing Don's confidence, never mentioned his friends. He, however, spoke of them as often as he saw them, quite as a matter of course. It was not necessary to lie to his wonder wife, nor hide from her; and his very determination always to tell her of his visits made them infrequent.

He felt very sorry for Maria, who seemed to miss him most dreadfully. Poor little thing! He wished he might find her a suitable husband. He began to look about among his friends. When he should find a young man who could properly support her, he would take him around some afternoon. Maria's beauty would do the rest. And she was sensible.

But he did not mention this philanthropic intention to Pat. He sensed that for some reason which was the mystery of women these two lovely creatures did not care for each other. Unfortunately, Pat's very repression generated a tearing suspicion that grew increasingly, as Maria dropped more and more out of Don's thought, and speech. That he so rarely spoke of one whom he regarded as a sort of obligation seemed strange. If he still looked upon Maria merely as the widow of his dead friend, why did he not speak of her more often? For of course he must see her—perhaps every afternoon.

Sometimes she would say, "Have coffee at Novedades' this afternoon?"

And if he had missed his coffee he would reply, "No, not this afternoon."

She would wait. But no more would he say. He had had his coffee *somewhere*. Why did he not say where? And if with *her*, why not say so outright?

Jealousy flourished like a weed. It rose with her of mornings, went with her throughout the activities of her days—a smothering weight. She could not put it by for a moment. It took her appetite; choked her when she tried to talk. Maria was so full of bright chatter—she could not forget that. And the more she remembered it, and tried to be bright, the more stupid she felt. Soon her mind held only one thought: had he seen Maria today?

She pictured them together in the pretty, if crowded, little sitting-room. Every afternoon something would seem to click in her mind, and she would consult her watch. Yes, four o'clock. They were together. What was she saying to him?

"I ought to kick up the devil and put a stop to it," she stormed in the privacy of her room. "I'm his wife. He'd have to stop if I—"

But would he? Spanish men were different. She would know what to do with an American husband. She could tell him where he got off. But she recalled that night when Don had left her for a whole night. He must have cared something for Maria then, to lie, and get so angry. Perhaps if she made a fuss now, he would leave her altogether. And he must not. He was merely fascinated by this creature. His real love belonged to her.

"The time is past when ladies step out and leave the field to near-ladies," she groaned. "Women fight for their own these days. But I don't know how to fight. If I raise the devil, I'll drive him to her for comfort. If I try to make him jealous, there'll be a killing. I don't know what to do."

She grew thin and pale and applied more rouge so that her delicate Dresden china coloring was lost. She appeared loud.

Often she caught Don looking at her strangely. He had long periods of silence. And his love-making, while ardent, yet held another quality, as if he asked a question. Was he thinking of the difference between herself and Maria?

DON thought of Maria only with annoyance. He would not answer her calls at the Spanish Club. Immersed in troubles of his own, he no longer had sympathy to waste on her unrequited love. He had noticed the change in Pat: her thinning cheeks; the pallor she strove to hide under spots of rouge which but intensified it; her almost feverish gaiety, as if she talked without knowing what she talked about. His sensitiveness caught a subtle difference in her embraces—as if she *strove* to make them the same.

He adored her, if anything more than ever. He had not failed in his duty to her in any way. There could be but one answer. She loved another. He did not suspect her of infidelity. She had no opportunity to be unfaithful.

But love came. Who could say whence? A look and it was done. This man who had estranged her from him—perhaps she had done no more than to shake his hand. It was enough.

Still, he must make certain. He called on his mother. "Who is the man whom my wife loves," he demanded, "the man she prefers to me?"

"It is impossible, my son," Madam Talbott replied fondly, "that Pat could prefer another to you."

"Woman, don't quibble! Who has she seen of late? Name them all. My heart will tell me when you have called the scoundrel by name."

"I do not know, my son, whom she has seen of late." Her large white hands were knitting busily.

"You don't know! But it's your business to know. I told you she was too innocent to be left to herself. Why don't you know?"

"She told your sister Odette that she was an American woman, not a Spaniard; and that she had been accustomed to having some time to herself. It got on her nerves to have some one always with her. She was very sweet about it. But naturally we have not called since."

Don paused in his restless walk and towered over her as if about to strike her. She continued to knit calmly. She was accustomed to the tempers of men. As for this son of hers—she knew if she were to slap his cheek, he would but burst into tears.

"How long ago was that?" he shouted.

"About a month ago."

"And you never told me! Oh, my God, it's true!" He looked as if he were about to sink down at her knee. But instead he slammed out of the room.

He went home. Pat was out. Alone! No. With *him!*

He drove all over town looking for her car. Of course they were not in town. He did not know where to go. He bought a gun and went to the Spanish Club.

ONE of his friends came up and spoke to him. He insulted his friend and they fought. That is, they passed several blows before they were separated. After that his friends left him alone.

He felt to see if his gun was still there. It was.

After all, it might be better to put a bullet through his own head and end his misery. He recollected that he had forgotten to buy cartridges. Of course he could get them. If only one could believe that death would be the end! He thought of his mother. Five daughters and but one son! Naturally daughters never could fill the place of a son in a mother's heart. It was unfair that a man should be brought into an unhappy world without his consent by a woman, and then could not conscientiously get out of it, without her consent. Also she had failed him. Pat had failed him. The two women who should have loved him.

Finally, when he was called to the telephone a second time by Maria, he decided to have coffee with her. Poor girl! She, too, was wretched for love's sake. At least she loved him. And if he decided to end it all, it was well for her to have the satisfaction of a good-by. It was the least he could do for her.

She was pathetically glad to see him. "You have been most cruel to poor little Maria of late," she said, tears in her melting dark eyes. She wore a soft rose frock, her black hair piled high to make her appear tall. It somehow, together with her very high heels, made her still more tiny.

"I have not meant to be cruel to you, Maria," he said, pressing both her small hands close. "But I have been most unhappy."

Her tears overflowed. "Ah, my poor friend! I knew it was so. Sit down and I will bring the coffee."

She pressed him into a big comfortable chair and hurried out. How comforting it was to have a woman's love at such a time! It made one feel less futile. She said she knew it was so. Perhaps she knew what he did not. Others always knew before the deluded husband. He would question her adroitly. After all, it would be better to kill the man who had won his beloved from him than to kill himself. The courts would free him, and perhaps, when Pat realized there was no comfort in loving a dead man, he could win her for himself once more. He had no pride. He had only love for her.

Yes, he would force Maria to tell him what he was now convinced she knew. Her mother was evidently not about. So much the better. She was a shrewd old woman. She would be sure to see through his questioning, and might restrain Maria, who would otherwise be as wax to his will.

PAT surveyed herself in a long mirror. Her fluffy gown of pale blue caught here and there with pink rosebuds was very youthful; her slender arms and shoulders almost childish; but her little heart-shaped face was pinched, her eyes tired.

The bell rang. She descended the broad stairway as Martin admitted the first of her dinner guests. Don had not yet arrived, and she felt sick with apprehension. When they were all gathered in the library she slipped out to tell Martin to hold dinner a half-hour.

"Mr. Talbott had some business in the country this afternoon," she said when she could delay no longer. "I am afraid he has had a puncture and can't get to a telephone. His spare was not good."

She saw two of the men exchange glances.

"There's a house in Caverly Street being painted light pink," she said. "I wonder who owns it."

One of the men fell into the trap. "I drove out that way this afternoon and I didn't notice it. Did you Wade?"

So they were in Caverly Street this afternoon. They knew Don's car, and where he was. That was why they exchanged glances when she said he went into the country. "Perhaps I was mistaken in the street," she said indifferently. . . .

The usual wifely fear of accident came to her. But Don was well known. She would have been notified at once. She thought of calling the police station; the hospitals. But she must do nothing that might lead to a scandal. Strangely, Pat, who had so recently been known as "The Terror of Park Avenue," had all at once become desperately anxious to avoid scandal.

At two o'clock, unable to endure the suspense longer, and thinking there might have been an accident after all, she called up the *Tribune*.

"This is Miss Smith of Ballas Park," she said. "Have you had any report of an automobile accident this afternoon or evening?"

"No. Has there been an accident?" a crisp masculine voice came back.

"I don't know. My brother went out early in the afternoon, and has not come back. I am uneasy about him. You would know if there had been any serious —accident—any one taken to the Hospital wouldn't you?"

"Yes, unless the accident had occurred within the last half-hour. I'll call up the police station, and call you back if you'll give me your number."

"Thank you. If there had been an accident it must have occurred late this afternoon."

"We have no report of any accident; but if you'll give me your number—"

She hung up.

After an interminable time she called the *Tribune* again. The same voice answered.

"We were disconnected a while ago," she said. "I was asking you if there had been any accidents—"

"Oh, this is Miss Smith? I got the chief on the wire right after you called. Nothing reported."

"If there had been anything serious the police would have known?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Thank you. Good night."

There was nothing to do but wait. The end? She would not contemplate it.

SITTING at her window, Pat watched a big sun rise out of the bay, striping it with wide and long bands of gold that quivered, as if the shivering terror which swept her had communicated itself to the great dun-colored body of water, widening and widening. Purple tones in the sky fled before the horrid light, and lazy white clouds drifted across the blue as though life were a measureless easement, instead of a bleak delusion.

This flabby, inactive person could not be herself. Waiting.

The telephone jangled. She almost fell on her way to it.

"This is Madam Surez," said a hateful liquid voice. "I have to tell you that your husband—"

"Is he hurt?" gasped Pat.

"Oh, no! Ease you min'. He will be well very soon. He come to see me last night for a little visit; we are such ol' frien's. He brought with him some wine. We drink together a little and that wine it is not good. Presen'ly he fall asleep. I am distress', but what can I do? When he do not wake up this morning an' I cannot wake him, I have to call the doctor. You will please to—"

Pat hung up the receiver.

She must make sure that Maria was not lying, and that he was in no danger. Not that his death seemed to matter. Nothing mattered. But she was his wife. She would not leave him if he were dying, or desperately ill, even though she must leave him if he recovered.

Maria was not to be seen—for which Pat was thankful. Madam Dominguez received her in great distress.

"Madam Talbott, you will not make of my daughter a byword. She tol' him again and again that he should not come so often. People they talk an' it was no good now that he was married. Such foolish children they were. A lover's quarrel. And Maria marries Don's frien'. But Don was mos' honorable while poor Carlos live. Also, when Carlos was dead, he would not come again to Maria. A man is proud. But love is more strong than pride. Too late he sees that. I have plead with him. But he would not listen. Last night he have see her for the first time alone, I swear. I thought it was over. They drink a little too much wine, perhaps—"

"Madam Dominguez, will you take me to my husband?" cut in Pat coldly.

The old woman led the way, protesting Maria's innocence; Don's masterful persistence.

Don lay on the bed in a stupor. The doctor sat beside him.

"Is he very ill?" asked Pat.

"He'll be all right when he wakes," the doctor said, dropping Don's wrist. "Probably sleep most of the day."

"The wine, it mus' be bad. Maria take only a sip an' is seek also," said Madam Dominguez.

The doctor gave the old woman a strange look.

"He is in no danger?" Pat asked.

"Oh, no! He'll come out all right. Mrs. Talbott, come and see me this afternoon, will you?"

"Thank you." Pat went out without further words.

It had come. The thing she had waited for ever since she had looked into the treacherous little face of Maria Surez and the ruthless mustached countenance of her mother.

On her way in to Tampa she thought of all the women she had known who had walked out, leaving the field to other women. She had held them in contempt. Now she understood. One cannot fight when one is wounded, bleeding.

At a cross-street while waiting on the traffic her eyes lifted to a sign on the side of a building: "Gordon's Detective Agency."

She didn't need a detective to discover the truth for her, but she would need witnesses, and the doctor was probably a friend of those creatures. He had asked her to come to see him—to make excuses for them, no doubt.

Parking her car, she sought the entrance to the agency. She shivered as with cold. All the ugly business of a divorce. But of course if Don loved Maria—had loved her all along, Pat would not humiliate herself by trying to hold him.

Presently she came out of the odious building followed by two odious men. They got in her car.

Madam Dominguez appeared greatly frightened at sight of Pat and the two men; but she admitted them, made no effort to stop Pat, who led the way to Don. Maria was sitting beside him.

She and her mother talked together, explaining, excusing, protesting, incriminating Don more and more.

"I shan't sue in Florida," Pat said to the men as they went out. "I couldn't bear it."

"Our depositions can be taken wherever you are," said one of the men.

She asked their bill, stepped in her car and writing a check asked them to catch a street car back to town. They were loathsome to her. "My lawyer in New York will write you."

WHEN Don waked, late that afternoon, his first thought was of the dinner his wife was giving. He tried to rise, but his head weighed a ton. He could not lift it. Madam began berating him for compromising her daughter. Maria was weeping bitterly. The old woman's voice grew far away. When he again awakened it was night and they were still sitting beside him. His head was clear now. And Madam made him understand all that had happened. He had hopelessly compromised her Maria. No man would want her after this. He had no right, even though Maria had asked him to stay when he saw that Maria's mother was not present. He was a man and should have more sense than a foolish girl. As her dead husband's friend, he should have protected Maria.

Don bolted from the house. His car still stood at the gate.

His lovely new home on the Bay Shore was dark. He went up to their bedroom. The bed was untouched, Pat's closet empty, every personal thing of hers gone.

He called his mother. She was at last alarmed. But she knew nothing.

He was at the bank when its doors opened. Mrs. Talbott had closed out her account the previous day around noon. Don went at once to a detective agency to have his wife located—the same agency employed the previous day by Pat. But they made no mention of this. After a delay of thirty-six hours they "discovered" she was on her way to New York.

Don took the next train for New York. . . .

MRS. JAMES DARCY WARREN, returning with her husband from the theater, found Don in the reception hall of her Park Avenue home, sitting bolt upright on a carved teakwood chair. He had refused to sit in the drawing-room.

"Why, Don! Where's Pat?" exclaimed Mrs. Warren.

"That's what I came to ask you. She has left me." He poured out his story, standing in the hall; even told his own dark suspicions of her, which he now knew were base. "She took detectives to Madam Surez's house. She means to get a divorce. She is in New York now. Where is she?" He was pale and shaking. He appeared little more than a terrified boy. "She is not with her mother, who let me search the house for her clothes. I would not believe her otherwise."

The Warrens exchanged glances of amusement as well as pity. Leading the way into the library, Mrs. Warren pressed him into a chair.

Warren poured a glass of brandy which Don pushed away.

"It is that that brought me to this. But one small drink. I shall never touch it again," he stormed.

Mrs. Warren took the glass from her husband, offered it to Don with an arrogance which brooked no refusal. "Drink it. Then I'll talk with you."

He gulped the drink. Presently he grew calmer.

"You are positive she came to New York?" asked Warren.

"Positive."

"Then the fact that she has not communicated with her mother nor with Mrs. Warren shows she wants neither sympathy nor interference from her friends; doubtless wants to avoid scandal. Paris, in such a case, might occur to her. It's a favored place for quick marital disentanglements. She is a tumultuous young person."

"The *Olympic* sailed this morning," put in Mrs. Warren, meditatively.

Don rose. "I'll find out. If she booked, I'll take the next boat."

They pointed out the foolishness of this. Where would he look for her? Not in the hotels, certainly, if she had made up her mind to hide herself away. And if he found her, what good would that do?

The only thing to do was to go home and wait until Pat had time to cool off, perhaps to discover how much she really loved him. She would then be in the right frame of mind to listen to his explanations.

Don finally agreed to be governed by Mrs. Warren's superior knowledge of women and of Pat in particular. But when he discovered on the following day that a girl answering Pat's description had taken passage on the *Olympic*, sailing under the name of Brown he booked passage on the next boat. It was clear to him that Pat did not intend to seek a New York divorce; otherwise she would have notified her friends. Paris was the vogue in her set. It insured quiet dispatch.

The Warrens protested. Pat might be anywhere on the continent. She might have returned to Tampa. She was hot-headed but sensible when she'd had time to think.

He got his mother on long-distance. No, Pat had neither returned nor written. His mother had sent every day to the house to learn whether there was any word from her.

LOOKING for a pretty, blonde girl in Paris, whose picture her husband has even forgotten to bring, is not like looking for a criminal whose face is known to many.

Miss Brown had disappeared the day after her arrival on the *Olympic*. But the Paris detectives were positive she was monsieur's wife; and they had new clues every day—that led to nothing. She was clever, this pretty "Miss Brown." But not so clever as the Paris detectives. If monsieur would but have patience! No one could escape them. Sooner or later—

Monsieur's patience, always thin, grew threadbare. Ah, but at last they had information whereby they would have her within forty-eight hours. There was no doubt this time.

Don returned to his hotel to get through the eternity of forty-eight hours. What he would do when he found her, he did not know. He had no plans. One did not plan when the heart was on fire. Somehow he would force her to believe him—or he would kill her and himself. Life without her was intolerable.

The hotel clerk handed him a cable from his mother.

"Pat registered at the Tampa Bay Hotel yesterday."

He hurried to the steamship's office and booked on a ship which luckily was to sail for New York the next day.

Then to pour maledictions on the fool detectives. They were amazed. But after all it was monsieur's fault. He had assured them his wife was in Paris. They had worked night and day for him. He had allowed them no sleep. Scarcely time to eat.

He paid their fat fee and left them to their indignation.

Not the good sense with which the Warrens had credited her, but strained nature had brought Pat's journey to a pause. The weeks of jealousy and suspense had robbed her wiry young body of its resistance, and while her husband sped around in New York in pursuit of her she lay in a hotel bed in Jacksonville attended by a physician. Here she had time to think.

The result of this thinking was that she recollected the peculiar look the doctor had given Madame Dominguez when she explained the fact that Maria had taken only a sip of the wine that had knocked Don out. His look had not been friendly to the mustached lady. He had asked Pat to come to see him. She now wished she had heard whatever he had to say. Also she thought it might be well to 'phone her detectives to see what steps Don was taking, if any.

Her detectives were quite obviously not pleased at finding her still in the state. Why had she said she was going to New York if she were not? They expected the confidence of their clients.

Her husband? Oh, he had gone to New York. How should they know what for? To find her no doubt. She had said she was going there.

Now what was the meaning of this? Surely a man didn't go chasing a wife to New York if he wanted to be rid of her. Pat went south instead of north and, after two days' strenuous thinking, sent a wire to Mrs. James Darcy Warren: "Have you seen Don?"

A reply to Mrs. Don Talbott: "A madman gone to Paris to find you."

Well! Still the fact remained that he had been with the creature when his wife was having guests to dinner. Drinking with her! The Spanish viewpoint, no doubt: loving his wife and chasing off after bright-colored bubbles. She was not, however, a Spanish wife. But in view of certain discrepancies between what that horrible old woman had said about Don's mad love for Maria and his pursuit of herself, it might be as well to hear what Dr. Martin wanted to say to her.

What he had to say, when she saw him the following day, acquainted her fully with Madam Dominguez and the lovely Maria. Don's visit, however, was not explained, nor justified. She was convinced that nothing could do this. Still, even a murderer was entitled to a hearing, as Dr. Martin pointed out. . . .

PAT did not communicate with Don's family. She would make no concessions. They would discover she was in town and notify him. Then let him bring on his hearing. And proofs! Nothing less.

She gave him two weeks in which to get back. She didn't figure on airplane service from New York to Tampa, which is not impossible for a young man who cares not for cost.

She was therefore astonished when the hotel clerk told her over the telephone that her husband was on his way to her room—three days too soon.

She was at the telephone when the door opened. She hung up the receiver as Don closed the door. He leaned heavily against it, his face white, his eyes so black that they appeared sightless.

"Where have you been?" he demanded hoarsely.

"To Miami." She was quite cool.

In spite of the seriousness of the situation, a smile flecked her eyes as she thought of his flying off to Paris. He caught it. His weeks of suffering burst forth.

"Why did you go to Miami? Did your lover go with you?"

"Don Talbott! Are you crazy?"

"Yes. You've driven me crazy. What are you doing here? I don't care. I forgive you. I can't live without you. I've been in hell. I'll make you love me again."

Fright dawned in Pat's face. "Don, I don't know what you are talking about. I went to Miami to think things out before I started divorce proceedings."

"Divorce proceedings? I won't let you have a divorce."

"You can't very well help yourself if I want it. I have talked to Dr. Martin, who attended you at Madam Surez's house," she added with an odd look in her eyes.

Suddenly he recollected the real cause of her flight. He flung his arms up in a wild gesture and started toward her.

She backed away.

"Oh, my darling! Don't shrink from me. Don't leave me. I shall kill myself and you before I let you divorce me. I won't live without you. Even my mother would not be so cruel as to wish it."

"What of Madam Surez?"

"I have given her up."

Pat's eyes hardened.

"Let her find her own husband," he went on violently. "I have no time to bother with her. I met a young man from Cuba three months ago whom I meant to introduce to her mother for her. But I had no time to go to see them. I was distracted. You no longer loved me. You grew pale. Your kisses were cold. You no longer talked gaily with me. Maria annoyed me with her 'phone calls. I would not answer her."

Pat laughed stridently. "I found you at her house—drunk."

"I was not drunk. She had some wine. I took but one glass. It was bad stuff."

"But you were there."

"Yes, I was there. You were false to me. My mother was false to me. Maria called me when I was contemplating a bullet in my head to end my misery. I went to say good-by to her."

"Don, what's all this rot about my being false to you and your mother being false?" Pat was both curious and indignant.

In burning words he poured out all his suspicions, his devastating jealousy of recent months, based on the change in her; then his discovery that she had forbidden his mother and sisters to accompany her. He told of his sympathy for Maria because of her love for him and his determination to get her settled before all this came up to make him forget her, except when she telephoned him at the club.

No one hearing that wild tumult of words, passionate, pleading, full of jealousy, yet forgiving; no one looking at his white face, his trembling hands which he strove now and again to hide in his pockets, his despairing black eyes, could have doubted his truth and sincerity.

"DON, how long had it been since you had been to see Madam Surez before that day?"

"I don't know. Three months—perhaps more. She was desperate. But don't talk of her. I am desperate. This divorce: you cannot get it. You must not."

"You could marry Madam Surez." Pat's eyes were covered.

"Do not speak to me of Madam Surez, I command you," he shouted. "I hate her. I have no cause. But she is somehow mixed up in all my torture. I do not want to look upon her face again."

The blue eyes were swiftly uncovered. They were like hard bright stones. "If I take you back, will you go with me and tell that *to her face?*"

"I'll kill her if you tell me." He started forward, one hand outstretched as if to drag Pat away. "Come, we will get it over."

Pat burst into joyous laughter and, as he seemed about to sink to the floor, flung herself on his breast, her arms around his neck. "We are two fools."

His arms enclosed her. A big armchair was conveniently at hand.

"Don, I think you ought to talk to Dr. Martin," she said after a long while. "He told me something that made me decide to hear your excuse for being there. Maria did not confess; but she was badly frightened and he knew what she had done."

Don was not listening.

The color flowed back to his face. His eyes shone.

"Is not love strange?" he said exuberantly. "I have been at death's door for weeks; one second I am too weak to stand, and the next I am like a lion. I feel that I have never been sick. It is like magic."

"Black or white?" she asked teasingly.

"Both. But you talk too much, woman. You interrupt the cure."

She sank back against his breast, yielding her soft lips to him.

Family Portraits

By Faith Baldwin

SOMETIMES (he does not know) I watch him stand,
Small, sturdy legs apart, fair head a-tilt,
His grave, blue eyes intent on them; one hand
Deep in a tiny pocket; and a lilt
Of new learned whistle-tunes upon his round,
Pursed mouth. And they, who from the pale
Walls flower, gilt-framed, answer, without sound
His silent question and unconscious hail.

I think they know, and welcome him. They sense
Their dry dust stir again to see him there,
Blood of their blood, sufficient recompense
For years—and silence. And they are aware
Of how in him, their immortality
Is promised; how no clod of earth may dim
Their battle-challenge; how the golden key
To their deep stores of wisdom is with him.

For he is theirs! The tinted, childish face,
The yet unblossomed flower of their seed,
His spirit is the slim sword of their race
Sheathed in a lovely scabbard; and their need
Of long, aspiring progress lives in him.
As once in them; and so, each from his frame
With years a little clouded, dusty-dim,
Hails one small man-child, trusted with their name.

A Dreamer Comes Into His Own

The Phantom Caravan

Having Served All His Family as Last-Minute Rescuer, Ammiel Discovers He Needs a Little Rescuing Himself

By Howard Vincent O'Brien

Illustration by Ralph Pallen Coleman

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

AMMIEL SPOTTSWOOD felt, after Adrienne had definitely refused to marry him, that life was beginning. It was a curious way to feel; by all the rules life should have been over. But it was not.

He looked back as on a dream: on a vague memory of his grandfather, that almost legendary patriarch, whom he, after all, understood as none of those who had known him in the flesh ever had; on his boyhood, with all the family forever preaching conformity to him—Jonas, the great business man; Stephen, the lawyer and politician; Blanding, his sister Hester's husband, the social arbiter; Sarah, with her imagist poet Ralph Destine, and her intellectual aspirations.

Well, he had seen them all through, so far, except the Blandings. He had taken over the great Bremling-Spottswood business when Jonas broke down. Jonas was still in California. He had saved Steve from a noisome scandal. He might yet open Sarah's eyes, to Destine's rottenness. He had hopes of Blanding. Only for himself, the impractical, the non-conformable, was he hopeless.

He had planned to go away, with his small legacy, and live in France. Sometime, even now, he might. His old friend Padgett, who had caused Phyllis Jerrold to break her engagement to him, was in Paris now—because Ammiel had sent him there to study architecture instead of losing himself in Peter Jerrold's business. For himself—oh, well!

Adrienne? All was over! She had made that plain at lunch. She was going to marry Jack Baxter: not Clem Thorsen, who loved her, but Jack Baxter, who wanted her. There was a difference.

LATE that afternoon Ammiel received a telephone call from John Currier. "Hello—Ammiel?" The speaker's voice seemed oddly muffled, as if he were trying to conceal his conversation from those near him. "Are you—do you have any dealings with the Boatmen's Bank?"

"Not yet," answered Ammiel with a chuckle. "But they've been after me. If you fellows ever treat us badly we might take it into our heads to do business with them."

Currier was silent for a moment. "Don't hold any stock, do you?"

"None. But why so mysterious?"

"Well—good-by," said Currier hastily. "I'm glad to hear it."

"Gosh!" Ammiel turned to Blanding, his brother-in-law, who sat on the other side of the desk. "For cutthroat competition commend me to banks. They never come straight out, like decent respectable business men, and say the other fellow's a cheat and a rascal. They just hint at it. That was a banker who thought somebody else was edging in on our account. He sounded worried!" Ammiel laughed. Then he frowned. "Odd, though, John's in the Trust Department. I wonder—"

Blanding interrupted him with a faint cough. "It's getting late, Ammiel. You were going to show me—"

Ammiel's face cleared. "Beg your pardon, Casper. Now then, what was it you wanted?"

"I—er—I don't want anything," murmured Blanding deprecatingly. "Only—that is to say, Hester has been wondering if—er—well, why you don't resume dividends. I—that is, she—has it that you've been doing an excellent business lately, and—"

Ammiel's features hardened slightly. "We have. Sales good—with a good margin. Lots of building going on. But"—he raised a warning finger—"I didn't go through the squeeze of last year without learning something."

"Of course not," agreed Blanding politely.

"The policy in this business," continued Ammiel, "has been to spend the profits when there were any—and squeal like stuck pigs when there weren't. I have a different idea. It's a notion of mine—and looking into the history of the country, the economic history they ought to teach instead of the dates of scraps with the Indians, convinces me that I'm right—that every business has ups and downs."

"Naturally."

"They come with some regularity, too. You can forecast them pretty nearly as well as the weather. Now, sailors don't throw away the sheet anchor when a squall ends, do they?"

"I don't suppose they do. But then, I—I'm not a sailor."

"You bet they don't! Well, my theory is that since we're due for a tumble every so often, it'll be a nice idea to spread out a good plump mattress under the trapeze. The last one pretty nearly broke Bremling-Spottswood's neck! It's my idea to quit figuring profit and loss annually. What I want to do is figure it over a five-year bracket."

A kind of horror came into Blanding's face. "You mean—you won't pay anything—for five years?"

"Not as bad as that," smiled Ammiel. "But dividend checks won't be what they used to be for some time to come. We've got to build up a surplus first. I'm through twiddling my hat in glassy-eyed bankers' front parlors. We'll do some of our own banking. That's what Rockefeller did with Standard Oil."

"Yes—but the stockholders!" protested Blanding, rolling his chamois-skin gloves in a nervous ball. "They—"

"Mother agrees. And Steve. And Jo wrote me to use my own judgment. So there you are."

Blanding gave a helpless sigh. "I don't understand such things, to be sure. Though I should think—doing a good business, and—"

"I've got a better memory than I had," said Ammiel calmly. "Last year trained it. Never again, Casper—never again!"

Blanding stared at the knob of his stick, his features troubled. "It—it is really most difficult," he said reluctantly. "You see, with Hester's income, we got along very well. But with that cut off—well, I must say, it's trying, to say the least. Living is so expensive."

"Why not have less of it?"

Blanding's eyes fluttered. "Less of it? I don't understand."

"Ease up on the spending. Cut out a few clubs—"

"OH, BUT we couldn't do that!" cried Blanding in a kind of alarm. "That is," he added, in some confusion, "the things upon which we could retrench are really so minor—a few dollars here and there—"

"But you're doing it, aren't you?"

Blanding shook his head. "I wish we were. But we aren't. We—we're getting into debt. It—well, it worries me a good deal, Ammiel. I don't like being in debt."

"Neither did I," said Ammiel with a cheerful grin. "But I got used to it. It's an easy thing to get used to. At first I worried when I couldn't pay. Then I decided that that was properly for the other fellow to worry about."

Blanding's troubled features relaxed in a polite but mirthless smile. "I've decided something like that, too. But it doesn't work. The other fellows don't just worry—they send collectors."

"Well, why don't you get a job?"

Blanding sighed. "Where could I get a job?"

"H'm!" Ammiel pondered, tapping his teeth with a penholder. "How do you like California, Casper?"

"Why—I like it, of course."

"Well, the man we had covering the Coast has left us. I wonder—maybe you could take his place? Oh, not right away, of course," he added hastily, at the consternation Blanding evinced. "You'd have to go through a course of sprouts here in the plant. I don't suppose you know the difference between red brass and red Indians, do you!"

"No, I don't think I do."

"You might make a salesman," continued Ammiel, with a glance of appraisal at his brother-in-law. "Good voice, plenty of manner, intelligent enough. It's not a big job. We don't do much on the Coast. But you could make it bigger. It pays—"

"It's awfully kind of you, Ammiel," interposed Blanding, as he rose. "I appreciate it. But I couldn't do anything like that. Really I couldn't. I—"

"Why not?" demanded Ammiel with a blank stare. "Can you think of a better chance?"

"Oh, it isn't that! Only—at my time of life—"

"You're not much older than I am."

"Yes. But I've been brought up—differently. My father never worked. There never seemed any particular reason why I should. Even after the family lost so much in New Haven, there was still enough. It's only that the cost of living has gone up so frightfully, and—"

"There isn't any reason why a man should work if he doesn't want to, I suppose," mused Ammiel. "Any law, really. But don't you find life pretty dull, Casper?"

"No," replied Blanding stiffly. "Can't say I do."

Ammiel continued to muse. "In theory, I agree with you. You're doing precisely what I would do if I could—that is to say, nothing. But in fact, I find that I disapprove of you, Casper."

Blanding coughed, and his close-shaven cheeks were touched with pink.

"I disapprove of you violently. Economically, you're a dead loss. Producing nothing, your keep is on the neck of some one else—merely because your grandpapa was clever—or lucky—or both. You are, in short, a parasite."

Blanding coughed again and the color deepened.

"I—I shall be going," he stuttered, his face purple. "I—have been insulted."

Ammiel's eyebrows rose in surprise. "Have you? Who did it? What an achievement!"

Blanding's answer was a slam of the door that made the windows rattle. With a grimace, Ammiel turned on his desk lamp and resumed his interrupted work.

He had insulted Blanding, no doubt. And he did not regret it. Blanding merited insult. But the poor fellow did not realize that the rough handling accorded him had had a double significance. Ammiel was not versed in modern psychology, but he was well aware, empirically, of the fact that the things we detest most in others are the weaknesses which are sheltered deepest in ourselves. In his scorn for Blanding he had expressed his scorn for himself.

ON THE way home he changed cars near the stone building which housed the Inland Trust Company, and a strange apprehension gripped him. Lights gleamed brightly from every window of the bank floor. At the entrance two motor trucks were drawn up, with men in their shirt-sleeves, unloading boxes from them. A crowd of the belated had gathered, their tepid curiosity held in check by policemen.

What could it signify? Currier's telephone conversation flashed in his memory. There had been something queer about it—anxiety at first, and then a kind of relief. Something, obviously, was in the wind. He hesitated a moment longer and then crossed the street. A policeman stopped him at the doorway, but old Flannagan, one of the watchmen, recognized him and let him pass.

The whole bank force seemed to be on duty. And in the elevator he encountered Currier, his arms full of books. "Hello!" he said. "Can't shake hands. I'm loaded."

"Evidently. What's up?"

Currier glanced cautiously at the others in the elevator. "Wait till I get rid of this stuff. Then we'll go up to my desk."

"Is it as bad as that?" laughed Ammiel.

"It's pretty bad," whispered Currier. "We've got a hard night ahead of us."

"WHY," asked Ammiel when, a little later, they were seated at Currier's desk, "did you ask me if I had any Boatmen's stock?"

"Because," answered Currier solemnly, "the Boatmen's has closed its doors!"

"Not that big thing! Why, I thought—"

"So did everybody. They still do. But tomorrow morning they'll know better."

"What caused it?" cried Ammiel.

Currier shrugged his shoulders. "They went too fast. And they—well, you know what Jim Beesely was to the Boatmen's. And you know where Beesely stands. That railroad in Montana. And yesterday, the Canovan Motors receivership. It was all Boatmen's money. Thank God, we are old-fashioned!"

"What's going to happen?"

"The clearing-house is trying to answer that now. I think the Mechanics' will take it over. It's too big to crash. Twyman thinks we ought to take it. But Cosgrave's against it. Says we've got enough. Anyhow, the clearing-house will underwrite the deposits—"

"But the stockholders will get nothing?" Ammiel asked.

Currier nodded. "Approximately that. But they might have expected it. They've milked it. Done just what you aren't doing with Bremling-Spottswood."

"And making my relatives howl," said Ammiel.

"What relatives?"

"Casper was in this afternoon. He intimated everything from incompetence to misappropriation—though I can't blame him. I guess he needs the money."

"I'm sure of that." Currier's gravity deepened, and he shot a curious glance at Ammiel. "I've been over the list of stockholders. Did you—have you any idea what Blanding's income is?"

"Oh, ten thousand or thereabouts. Maybe more."

Currier made a mental calculation. "I thought so. Did you know—practically everything he has is in Boatmen's?"

Ammiel straightened. "Good heavens—*no!*"

Currier nodded again. "His father was a great friend of Beesely's."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Ammiel. "Now he is in a mess. But isn't there a chance—of his getting something?"

"Not for a long time. And not much then. It's gone, Ammiel—that's all there is to it. Gone!"

"Heaven's above! What will I do with him?"

"You?"

"Somebody's got to take care of him. He hasn't any more sense than a guinea-pig. Well—I guess Casper's going to taste the joys of honest toil after all. Meanwhile—" He paused, whistling softly. "I swore I wouldn't consent to a dividend. But maybe we'll have to. Maybe—"

"I think," suggested Currier diffidently, "if Blanding had to stand on his own feet—"

"Hester would starve," was Ammiel's grim response. "As a beast of burden, Casper will be about as useful as a pedigreed French poodle. He's decorative, John, and he can learn parlor tricks. But he didn't take kindly to my suggestion that he peddle Bremling-Spottswood plumbing fixtures."

"What are you going to do?" asked Currier as Ammiel rose.

Ammiel straightened his shoulders as if he were lifting a burden. "I haven't an idea," he said flatly. "But something'll turn up. It always has."

Downstairs, he telephoned home that he would dine downtown. "Any mail for me?" he inquired.

"Nothing," said Sarah, who had answered his call. "Except Mr. Jerrold called up. Said he'd like to have you drop over this evening if you could."

As Ammiel ate his solitary meal, the irony of the situation grew more apparent. It was more than dubious whether Blanding could hold down the job he had suggested. For a good while, certainly, whatever was paid him would be sheer charity. And it wouldn't be much—couldn't be, in fairness to the others. What would Hester make of the situation? She could not, obviously, live as she had lived. What resources within herself did she have upon which to fall back?

It was because he understood Hester that he had suggested a job in the West. The only possible way that she could endure poverty was by fleeing from her old life. In another environment she might build a new life and a sounder one. The probabilities were not great. She was more likely to sit in bitterness, hugging the ashes of a dead fire, cursing Fate—and presently, by an inevitable identification, her husband.

He paid his check and rose from the porcelain-topped table. He might, he told himself, help them toward the essentials of mere existence. Beyond that, he could do nothing. He could not help toward happiness. He wondered, soberly, if any one could do that—for any one else.

On the way home he recalled Mr. Jerrold's request. He stopped at the latter's house, a huge pile of gray granite, in darkness save for the light which gleamed from the curtained windows of the library. A certain pathos in that, he reflected, as he went up the old-fashioned front steps—a man with so much, and so alone. And yet, perhaps not so lonely as he seemed. Solitude might reign in a library, but loneliness halted on the threshold.

THE butler, evidently, was expecting him, and took him directly to Mr. Jerrold.

"So—you got my message," said the latter, putting down his book and rubbing his eyes. "Have a drink? Cigar? Prefer a cigarette, eh? Queer how times change. In my day cigarettes marked the sissy—or the rake. Now, doctors recommend them to nervous old men. Well, how are you, Ammiel?"

"Oh—*comme ci, comme ça.*"

"Still piling up that surplus?"

Ammiel nodded. "So far, so good. But they'll get it, sooner or later. Jonas will come back. Then I'll fade out. They won't listen to me. They think profits are made to be spent."

Mr. Jerrold looked at his visitor with a kind of wistfulness. "Phyllis, I think, made a mistake," he said irrelevantly. "Still—" He reached for his coat, and from an inner pocket drew a letter with a foreign postmark. "I guess she rectified it. Or you did. You have a head on your shoulders, boy."

"I?"

"Who else? I'm an old fool," said Mr. Jerrold bluntly. "I'd have had Douglas in business—and my daughter would never have seen anything in this life but Palm Beach and Pomeranian pups, and—and—well, she'd never have seen anything. As it is, she is growing up, Ammiel. I have here a report on the Padgett Development Corporation—no dividends—but both parties are developing. Egad, they are!"

"It seems," said Ammiel, musing, "that the way to grow up is to—grow the way Nature meant. I mean, the ivy has to have something to cling to, or it dies."

"And if you put walls around the oak, it dies!"

"Yes. Old Padge is doing what he wanted to do. He was meant to be an architect—"

"Predestination?" suggested Mr. Jerrold quizzically.

"Something like that—yes."

"And was I foreordained to make soap?"

Ammiel looked at his host gravely. "Is there anything else you'd rather have made—I mean, you aren't disappointed, or bitter, or ashamed?"

Peter Jerrold slapped his thigh. "No, by gravy! I've made soap—damned good soap—and I've sold it. My digestion's good. Do I look bitter—any of those things?"

"You look extraordinarily well!"

"I'm nothing but a manufacturer," continued Jerrold, much as Bonaparte might have said, "I'm nothing but a soldier." Suddenly he frowned. "Speaking of that—the Padgett Development Corporation is expanding—along lines not altogether unexpected. There's going to be a little Padgett—a pair of 'em, maybe. Twins ran in Mrs. Jerrold's family."

"Fine!" exclaimed Ammiel.

"H'm!" Mr. Jerrold appeared dubious. "The expansion will take capital. According to this report, expenditures are on the tail of income. We'll have to float a bond issue, Ammiel. First mortgage, secured by the person—or persons—of the Padgetts yet to come."

"Prime security," laughed Ammiel.

"Gilt-edged! And I'll take the whole issue. You'll waive your rights?"

Ammiel shook his head. "No! I refuse to be squeezed. Why, first thing I know, you'll have control of the corporation!"

Jerrold's nod was bland. "I always get control of corporations when they're good. Otherwise I sell. This is too good to divide. I want your stock, Ammiel—got to have it."

Ammiel struck an attitude. "No!" he declared, his hand on his heart. " 'Tis all

I have. Grandfather would be pained. I made money out of our superheater thing. I've got to strike an average."

"No!" Mr. Jerrold was equally firm. "I'm sorry, my boy—these things will happen in finance. You've got to make some more money. I can't allow you to lose anything more in Padgett Common. I'm a selfish man. I insist upon doing the losing myself."

AMMIEL groaned, covering his face. "Oh—Big Business again! What chance has the Little Fellow?" He straightened defiantly. "But if I refuse?"

Mr. Jerrold took a cigar from the humidor at his elbow, holding it poised like a pistol. "This," he warned. "My doctor says if I don't cut down on my smoking, he won't answer for the consequences. If you refuse, I—I smoke—before breakfast, even. Then I'll die—and the Padgett Corporation will liquidate."

Ammiel collapsed in his chair. "I am conquered," he muttered brokenly. "The threat is too awful!"

"I get what I want," growled Peter Jerrold. "Never oppose me. I'll send you a check tomorrow. No, I won't, either. That will take ready money—and you'd invest it foolishly, anyway. I'll make a trade. I'll send you some Jerrold stock."

"In short," laughed Ammiel, "you'll do what you jolly well please?"

"Of course!" Mr. Jerrold lighted his cigar. "It'll give you a thousand a year—or better, if we earn it."

"But what will the Padgetts say?"

"I'm going to discuss it with them. That is, if I can make up my mind. I—I'm thinking of going abroad."

"Flying trip?"

"No—two or three years. It—it would be pleasant, Ammiel. I've never really been abroad—oh, a week or two, here and there. But not a real stay. I think I'd enjoy it."

"Retiring from business?"

"Retiring?" Jerrold laughed disdainfully. "Me? D'you think I want to die?"

"But you spoke of two or three years."

"Oh, I'd have plenty to do. It's a real job."

"Representing some company?"

Jerrold nodded. "A very large company! None larger." Then he smiled. "I'm getting mysterious already. But it's simple enough. Fact is, Ammiel, I've always been pretty much mixed up in politics—behind the scenes. Collecting for the party—that sort of thing. And I'm now being paid off. The President has offered me a rather big job in the diplomatic service."

"You?" exclaimed Ammiel incredulously. "Why—"

"I thought that'd startle you. I speak no French, know none of the ropes—in short, the papers of the opposition would call it the worst sort of a political appointment."

"Oh, but—"

Peter Jerrold nodded with a certain complacency. "There is, of course, another side to it. I know something of business—and an ambassador, after all, is nothing but a super-salesman. Also, if I don't know diplomacy"—he made a gesture toward the crowded bookshelves around him—"I do know quite a little history." He was silent for a moment, appearing to muse. "My business is in good shape—every man in it has been trained to take the place of the man ahead of him. I could go, all right. But—"

"But what?" demanded Ammiel with a touch of truculence. "Why do you hesitate? A better man couldn't be found."

Jerrold's eyes flickered in a faint smile. "So you say—and thank you kindly. But imagine what your family would say. An illiterate peddler of cosmetics in the footsteps of Ben Franklin! A shirt-sleeved—and I wear suspenders, Ammiel—business man, trying to match wits with the best-trained intellects of Europe! Why, they'd blush for shame!"

"You could match wits with anybody!" declared Ammiel stoutly.

"In big things—yes, perhaps," answered Jerrold reflectively. "But in the little things—well, I haven't had much education, you know. Things you were born to, things you absorbed with your mother's milk, I've had to pick up as best I could—or not at all."

"Oh, those little things!" Ammiel dismissed them contemptuously.

"Little things—aren't always little—in diplomacy. It's like clothes. Clothes don't make the man—any person with sense knows that. But I insist that all our salesmen wear blue suits—dark suits, anyway—and keep their shoes polished. It shouldn't make any difference—but they sell more goods."

AMMIEL nodded. "The less you have, the more you've got to show," he said shrewdly. Then he added: "What you need, Mr. Jerrold, is the right kind of a secretary."

"A secretary?"

"Yes. Oh, I don't mean somebody to punch a typewriter. But somebody who knows all the things—the little things—that you—aren't sure of."

"Well, would you like the job, Ammiel?" Mr. Jerrold spoke softly, and he seemed intent on his cigar. But to Ammiel the tone was that of a trumpet, and the eyes of the older man seemed to pierce him like tongues of flame.

"Would I like it?" he echoed, his voice quivering. On his closed lids, as on the screen of a cinema, danced the life of Paris. "Would I like it!" he breathed again. "Saints on their thrones! Why—er—yes! I think I would."

"I thought so," chuckled Peter Jerrold.

Ammiel nodded, looking at his fingers. He wondered why they trembled so. "Yes—it would be entertaining." He marveled at the unconcern with which he spoke—he had not dreamed he could be such an actor. "But—"

"There are 'buts,' then?"

"I'm otherwise occupied. You see—I—I have a job."

"But Jonas—"

"Jonas is—not well," said Ammiel firmly. "I—I couldn't possibly leave." The finality he put in his tone was entirely convincing. It convinced Jerrold.

"I'm sorry. I'd like to have you. In fact—I hardly dare try the thing without you."

Ammiel lighted a cigarette, and spent some time hunting a place to deposit the match. He was procrastinating. He had kicked the door shut, but he hesitated to lock it. However, if it were to be done, 'twere well it were done quickly. "I know a better man," he said with no emotion save a slight tightening of his facial muscles. "Casper Blanding. He's never done a thing in his life—couldn't if he tried. But he knows how everything should be done. He's a walking guide-book to the proper thing."

"Yes—but—" Mr. Jerrold was frankly dubious.

"Casper never makes a mistake. He knows exactly what is what. He has no brains, no imagination, no energy—he can be absolutely depended upon. He's an aristocrat. He—well, he is precisely what you need. He will make the Embassy a model of what embassies ought to be."

"Well," said Jerrold, "just what I'm looking for, all right. But what makes you think Blanding would want the job? I couldn't pay him so much."

Ammiel smiled quizzically. "The money, Mr. Jerrold, would be incidental. The fact is, he—ah—would be delighted to go abroad under such—er—pleasant circumstances."

"You really think you could arrange it?"

"I am certain!" Ammiel's teeth clicked.

"I'd rather have you, Ammiel. But—"

Ammiel rose. "I'll see Casper tonight. He'll get in touch with you tomorrow. Good night, Mr. Jerrold."

"Don't go. It's still early," protested the older man. "Let's chat a bit."

But Ammiel, as the books say, had gone out into the night.

AMMIEL returned from the train, where, with all the Spottswoods and their progeny that could be mustered, he had assisted in seeing off the Blandings, with a heavy heart. He was not sure which had sickened him the most—Hester's complacent pride, or Casper's furtive gratitude, or the felicitations of the family.

"Isn't it wonderful!" Sarah had cried. "And don't you wish it were you, Ammiel?"

"Your grandfather would be so proud," his mother had added. "He was so public-spirited himself. Isn't it splendid of Casper to help out Mr. Jerrold—and the country—this way! Giving up his home and everything!" To which she added, somewhat illogically: "Oh, my poor, dear Hester!"

And Stephen had observed: "Old Jerrold is a clever man, all right. He knew how to pick the right fellow. Well, Casper, old chap—don't let him make too many blunders."

To all this Ammiel had nodded and agreed and been properly enthusiastic. No one, save Blanding, knew anything of his part in the situation. . . .

It was a gray day, with a chill fog in the air, and Ammiel's soul, as he walked back to his office, was gray likewise. Even the bitter, irrational hate he felt for Blanding and Stephen—the pompous idiot!—and Jonas—the shirker!—blazed fitfully under ashes of resignation. What was the sense of hating any one—even those who had injured him? And certainly neither Jonas nor Steve, nor Casper had consciously injured him. If he suffered, it was his own fault. Rather, it was Fate. And only imbeciles railed at Fate.

After all, he presently decided with naïve honesty, what had *he* deserved of Fate? What had he done with the years of his life to merit reward? He had been a bystander, contemptuous of the bungling incompetence of other men in the shaping of their lives, refusing to recognize that at least they *tried* to shape them. His was the ignoble rôle of the spectator at a prize-fight, noisy in his denunciation of slacking in the ring.

Adrienne was right. What was there in his cold inert clay to strike fire from her heart? It would be tragedy if her tingling vitality were to echo futilely in the empty chambers of his soul. Doomed, he was—condemned to be what he was.

The shadows passed from his face, and he broke into a whistle. He glanced at his watch. It was near closing time. He quickened his pace. There were a number of things at the office. . . .

But there proved to be only one thing—the others were swept aside. That one was a telegram from Jonas, and as he read it, his thoughts took wing through the grimy windows of Bremling-Spottswood & Company.

It was brief enough, announcing merely that Jonas, fully repossessed of his health, was coming home.

Ammiel, his eyes snapping, stared at the familiar litter of papers on his desk. When his secretary entered with a sheaf of letters for his signature, she seemed to be a figure in a nightmare—fading—fading—

Jonas was coming home!

Mechanically, he wrote his name again and again, at the bottom of portentously worded drivel concerning matters of no consequence. He chuckled happily, the refrain of the telegram singing in his ears.

"I suppose you think it's a gray day, Miss Downey?" he inquired of his secretary.

"Why, yes, sir—rather gray."

"All wrong, Miss Downey!" he exclaimed like a child with the wrong answer to his conundrum. "It's a beautiful day. And it isn't getting dark! Why, it's sunrise!"

"Yes, sir." Miss Downey took the letters and beat a hasty retreat. Young Mr. Spottswood was more peculiar than usual.

Ammiel sat quietly thinking as the shadows deepened. The thrill of Jonas's telegram had passed, and profound sadness followed. The darkness struck him as symbolical. It was as if a door, long closed, had opened a little, only to close again. In Adrienne he had felt a kind of answer to the hopeless puzzle of life—not a complete answer, to be sure, but enough of one to give purpose and meaning to effort. With her gone, what remained? Nothing—the far-away murmur of the city seemed to answer. Nothing—echoed the trucks rattling over the cobbles on the street below. Nothing—was the derisive shriek of a switch engine in the neighboring yards.

JONAS was coming home. The last obligation to effort would soon be gone. He was back at the beginning, a little richer, a little wiser, and much sadder. That which he had sought had eluded him and vanished. The door, opened to a glimpse of fulfilment, had closed with a dull finality.

He sighed. On the morrow he would be thirty years of age—half the span of life encompassed. For those years he had nothing to show. But what did that matter? What did any one have to show? Some dollars amassed, a book written, a picture painted, a machine invented. What mattered any of those things, in the pitiless light of the years which had preceded them, and the years which would follow?

They were illusions, like the rather absurd grandeur of the pyramids—simulacra of permanence, mocking the shriveled kernel of flesh which had created them. Pathetic pretense of immortality! From the sentient years no man had ever gained, or could gain, any reality save that of contentment—and that, too, was an illusion, a relative thing. . . .

In the morning, when he came down to breakfast, he was surprised to find Dr. Taplow awaiting him. "Hello!" he exclaimed. "You *are* an early bird."

"You don't lie abed yourself," countered the doctor.

"The plant's a long way off," laughed Ammiel. "If I waited for mother and Sal

I'd never get there. Have some coffee?"

"Thanks—no." The doctor took out his blackened pipe, considered it for a moment, and with a scowl, put it back in his pocket. "Cut out smoking before noon," he grumbled. "Trying to. Well, I came to wish you a happy birthday, Ammiel."

"By George—so it is! I'd forgotten. Thanks, Dr. Tap. But—" He put down his coffee cup. "There's something else in the wind. What—"

"It's your thirtieth."

"To be sure. But—"

"And I am one of your guardians."

"Guardians?" Ammiel looked blank. "Guardians of what?"

"Your spiritual welfare," chuckled the old man. "I'm charged with the task of seeing that you walked upright in the paths of righteousness. And I've done nothing but —watch. Your grandfather had a sense of humor."

"My grandfather?" echoed Ammiel, still wondering.

Dr. Taplow's chuckle died in his beard. "Are you righteous, boy—and upright?"

"It depends on what you mean."

"Precisely. And so—makes no difference. More important—are you happy?"

Ammiel shrugged his shoulders. "I—I think not. No—most decidedly not."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"That is reason in itself. Are you, then, unhappy?"

"No."

"Is there anything you want—very much?"

Ammiel stared for a moment at the unopened newspaper beside his plate. "Yes," he whispered.

"What?" The doctor's question came like a pistol shot.

"A girl."

"H'm. Can you buy her?"

"Now what the devil do you mean by that?" demanded Ammiel in early-morning exasperation.

"What I said," replied the doctor placidly. "You want that which you have not. There is, evidently, an obstacle. I ask you—is it—money?"

"Oh!" Ammiel hesitated. He thought of Baxter. "Yes," he said slowly. "I—I think so. Partly." Then he thought of Adrienne, and he reddened for what was a shameful thought. "No," he cried. "It isn't. Not that at all."

"In short," snapped the doctor, "you don't know. Or if you do, you won't tell. Well—so be it. Have you finished your breakfast?"

Ammiel drained his cup. "Yes. What next?"

"You and I have a bit of business to discharge," said the doctor mysteriously. "Come."

Wondering, Ammiel obeyed. "Might I ask where we're going?"

"For a walk, first. Nice morning, what?"

With an extraordinary stride for a man of his years, the doctor set off in the direction of downtown. Ammiel, at his side, asked question after question. But since the replies were monosyllabic and unenlightening, he presently gave it up, and walked in silence.

Occasionally an automobile passed, its occupants smiling an invitation to join them. But the doctor always shook his head.

"Murderers!" he growled. "Don't they know that walking keeps me alive?"

"I'm not in your class," panted Ammiel. "Aren't we nearly there?"

"We are precisely there," answered the old man, glancing up at the clock overhead. "And precisely on time." He had halted at the bronze-grilled entrance of the Inland Trust. "Enter, my boy. You are not unexpected." He led the way to an elevator.

"Mr. Twyman," he said to the colored porter on the trust floor. They were ushered immediately into the latter's office.

"Good morning, doctor. You are punctual. Good morning, Ammiel."

Ammiel took the hand which the slender little man with the white mustache held out to him, and accepted his invitation to be seated. In the presence of these two old men he felt extraordinarily young.

MR. TWYMAN took a long envelope, bound with red tape, from his drawer, and opened it. He cleared his throat and adjusted his reading glasses. "Your grandfather," he began, "was a somewhat peculiar man. Am I right about that, Taplow?"

The physician nodded. "Somewhat."

"Unconventional, I might say. And whimsical. A man who cared nothing for wealth—and accumulated a great deal.

More, indeed, than even I suspected. Your grandfather kept his own counsel, Ammiel. A rather secretive man."

"Yes," said Ammiel respectfully.

"He had an extraordinary—almost, I might say, a transcendental affection for you," continued Mr. Twyman. "I choose that word because, in a sense, he scarcely knew you. You were, of course, a mere child. None the less, he felt very deeply that in you his own spirit would continue. He was, however, accustomed to check his impulses. And so he provided that we—Dr. Taplow and myself—were to act as your guardians, while we lived."

"But you haven't done any guarding!" protested Ammiel.

Mr. Twyman smiled wisely. "Perhaps I should say watchers, rather than guardians. It was his wish that we watch you closely, and—"

"Watch me? Good Lord, what for?"

"I am coming to that. But first I must repeat—"

"Oh, get to the point, Twyman," growled the doctor.

"I must repeat," continued the banker imperturbably, "that your grandfather was wealthier—much wealthier—than any one suspected. In his will he provided suitably, as he thought, for every one. Except for the minor bequest given you five years ago, he divided his fortune equally. Have you—er—never wondered at the discrimination made in your case?"

"Naturally," laughed Ammiel.

"Were you never—ah—resentful?"

"No. Why should I be? It was his money, wasn't it? And I didn't need it."

Mr. Twyman and the doctor exchanged glances. The former coughed and continued: "Your grandfather, skeptical in most things, cherished a profound belief in immortality. He was convinced that from the next life he would be able to keep this under observation. It amused him to make—ah—I suppose you might call it a test. He had seen what an excess of money could do. He wanted to see what the reverse would accomplish. He wanted—how shall I express it?—to—"

"He wanted to see if you'd develop envy and a few other deadly sins," interposed the doctor. "Rancor, bitterness, jealousy—"

"What a quaint thought!" exclaimed Ammiel.

"Very," agreed Mr. Twyman. "And yet—interesting. We discussed it often. It was his thought that money, *per se*, affected only the weak. If you were affected by his seeming discrimination, you thus proved to his satisfaction that you were not—"

"His true heir," said the doctor bluntly.

"Just so! On the other hand—" Mr. Twyman paused, selecting his words carefully. "I said that his entire fortune was distributed. But he was heavily insured—very heavily insured. That sum was left in trust. Well—er—I suppose you might read this for yourself." He held out a sheet of crackling paper.

Ammiel's fingers trembled as he accepted it, and for a moment the lines were blurred. Then its significance flashed upon him, and the paper fluttered to the floor. "Heavily? Great Scott! It—why, it's a *fortune!*"

Mr. Twyman nodded. "A very considerable fortune," he said equably. "You are a wealthy man, Ammiel."

"But—" Ammiel stared from one to the other of the old men. He picked up the document and read its contents again. "This—this says that you—'in the discretion of'—that means—"

"It means," began Mr. Twyman pedagogically, "that—"

"It means just what it says," snapped the doctor. "If, in our opinion, we being old codgers wise in the ways of the world, the money would hurt you, you were never to hear of it. Half of it was to go into medical research, at my choice, and Twyman was to have the wasting of the other half."

"And—you decided it wouldn't hurt me?" asked Ammiel softly. "Why?"

Mr. Twyman grew slightly embarrassed at the directness of the question. "I—er—have watched your business progress closely, Ammiel. You have displayed—ah—well, a remarkable acumen, I must say. The way you have handled the affairs of Bremling-Spottswood & Company in Jonas's absence has been—most competent. And the disposition you made of your ten thousand dollars—well, I must confess that at the time I—er—was a little fearful—"

"DON'T be an idiot, Twyman," growled Dr. Taplow. "You can get more out of money than six per cent and safety." He turned to Ammiel. "That's why your grandfather put me on the board of supervisors. He knew Twyman was a practical man. And he hated practical men, Ammiel. The way you frivoled away your money in that Padgett nonsense—"

"I doubled my stake!" laughed Ammiel.

"Precisely. Your grandfather always said that dreamers couldn't help getting rich. They're like Gipsies—always have plenty."

"Money!" Ammiel fingered the paper, musing. Then he looked up. "What a lot of it! Buy anything! Do anything! But—all the money in the world won't make gasoline explode, will it!"

"I—I don't think I understand," said Mr. Twyman, frowning. "Gasoline—"

Dr. Taplow rose. "Don't try, Twyman," he chuckled. "Remember—he's Ammiel's grandson."

"Do *you* understand, Taplow?"

The doctor stroked his beard. "No," he confessed. "But sometime, privately, Twyman, I will discuss matters which you, being a bachelor, and I the same, have no business to discuss. And now, Mrs. Petwerk the elder, with a severe case of nerves, needs my attention—and treatment for dyspepsia."

Ammiel rose also. But Mr. Twyman held up a detaining hand. "Just a moment, Ammiel. There was a letter to be handed you on this occasion." He fumbled in the large, red-girdled envelope, and brought out a smaller one, sealed with wax.

Ammiel took it, studying his own name, in faded ink. He hesitated for a moment. Then he put the envelope in his pocket. "If you don't mind," he said with a frank smile, "I—think I'll read this privately."

Mr Twyman looked disappointed. But the doctor nodded approval. "I think your grandfather would prefer it that way." Then he pointed to the door. "Better go now—before we give you good advice. We're old men, you know, and you're young."

Ammiel, smiling, did as he was bidden. He was glad to go. Stunned by what had taken place, he wanted to be alone.

He did not take out his grandfather's letter until he had reached the privacy of his own office. Even then he hesitated. There was something awesome in these words, coming to him across the years. It gave him the eery feeling that his grandfather had never, really, died. The eyes of the photograph on the wall seemed to twinkle corroboration.

At last, breaking the waxen seal, he took out a sheet of paper, yellowed and brittle at the corners. The words, he found, were few:

"This is supplementary to the legal documents Twyman has drawn up. It is to simplify what he will doubtless muddle. If you want advice, go to him. If you want understanding, go to Taplow. Both, of course, may be dead as you read these words. In that event their successors must fill the bill as best they may.

"You may waste this money, or multiply it, or do good with it. As to which, I am indifferent. I trust only that you may find it, in some degree, a means to contentment—which is, I believe, all that man may beg, borrow or steal from this life.

"I lie here, contemplating the road I have traveled: some of it in shadow, some in shine coming from nowhere and leading to that from which it came; a mirage. But it is all we know. Faith, honor, courage—the lights which hold the darkness back. None knows the beginning or the end. Only that the burden must be carried, the journey made.

"It may be your temptation (as it has been mine) to set it down and watch the struggle of fools. But life is a tight-rope. If you halt, you fall. This money may be a balancing pole. A tight-rope (the image pleases me!)—both ends in shadow—the footing uncertain—a bridge from nothing to nothing—slender, perilous. But he of clear head can cross, however heavy the load. He who halts is lost. That much I *know*. The rest is surmise."

Characteristically, it was unsigned.

AMMIEL sat very still, his eyes fixed on the fine, tremulous writing of the letter. He was so intent that he did not hear the door open. It was not until his secretary offered a discreet cough that he looked up.

"Mr. Jameson is waiting," she said. "You promised to see him about the Malmsey job in Detroit."

"Yes," murmured Ammiel. "They want us to shade our bid on soil pipe. Important—oh, very! We—er—mustn't halt, must we? Show Mr. Jameson in—I'll see him immediately."

AMMIEL met Jonas and his family at the train. "Shades of the Golden Gate—you're looking fit!" he exclaimed.

Jonas nodded comfortably. "And I'm feeling it. Well—how's things?"

"So-so. You'll be wanting breakfast, I suppose? A hotel?"

"We've had it," said Jean. "I'll take the children and go right up to—the house."

"I'm glad you're back, Jo," Ammiel said with a significant nod at the swivel chair with its shiny leather cushion, behind the desk; after they reached the office.

"Thanks. So am I." Jonas sat down in a chair near the door. "Now then—we'll talk, eh?"

"That's your chair—over there."

Jonas shook his head, smiling. "It was. It's yours, now."

It flashed suddenly upon Ammiel that this scene was exactly as he had feared it would be—Jonas, exactly as he had feared. "I think you might explain that," he said, wondering why his voice shook so.

Jonas nodded. "No use beating about the bush. I—I'm not coming back, Ammiel. I'm all through."

"Not coming back," echoed Ammiel dully. "All through?"

"Yes. My mind's made up. Took me a long time, but I did it. Or, rather, Jean did it for me."

"Jean?"

"Yes. A woman sees things clearer than men, Ammie. Don't ever forget that. We figure things out with a ruler and compass. A woman jumps—like a cat. She gets there oftener than we do—and quicker."

Ammiel sat down in the desk chair—Jonas's chair. "Yes—go on."

"Well, we've made up our minds that the thing for us to do is—what we want to do. I've got enough to live on. And mother and Sal—they're taken care of all right. I don't have to worry about them, with you on the job. You—why, you've bloomed like a green bay tree, boy! It's remarkable. You—"

"Thanks," said Ammiel dryly. "Go on with the picture." It struck him suddenly that a droll reversal of things had somehow taken place—Jonas, diffident, hesitating, in the rôle of the younger brother, he, calm and judicial, in the rôle of the elder. "Go on," he repeated.

Jonas, evidently, found it difficult. "Pictures! You've put your finger on it. I—you see, I've always wanted to paint." He spoke with some embarrassment, and his words came slowly. "Always. But I had the business. Painting seemed—sort of silly, for a great hulk of a man like me. And father—well, grandfather had been a successful man, and father was carrying on, and it seemed up to me to fall in line."

"You hated it, I suppose?"

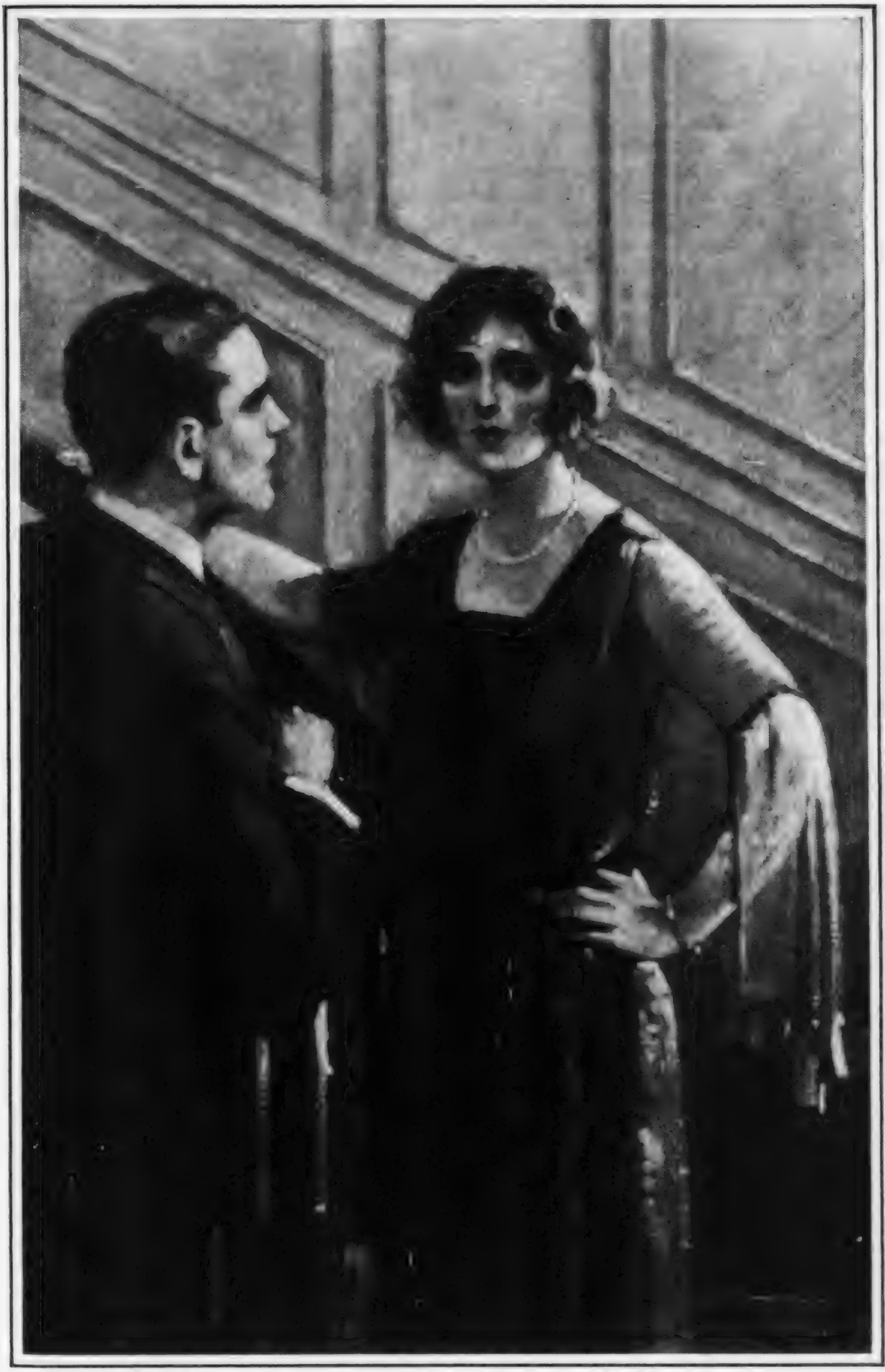
Jonas shook his head vehemently. "I loved it! I wanted to make the business bigger than I found it. It wasn't the money—except that money talks. I was just chuck-full of ambition those first years—and happy, too. I made money and had a good time—and I thought that was all a fellow could get out of life."

"How about your idea of wanting to paint?"

"Forgot it," said Jonas simply. "Or thought I did. Didn't have room in my mind for anything but business. Yes, I was happy then—no doubt about it," he murmured reflectively. "But I got to worrying—don't know why. There wasn't anything to worry about, really. And finally—the crash." His face was grave for a moment. Then it broke into a smile. "Luckiest thing that ever happened to me! It was painful, God knows—but major operations usually are. When I got over it, I began to think about things—and I had a perspective. First off, I found my wife wasn't happy. That was *one* job I'd fallen down in. I wasn't happy, myself. I'd just dreamed I was. Jean— You'd be surprised how much that girl knows about things. It's her idea that every man has a lot of different personalities in him—as an actor has different costumes in his wardrobe—but that there's just one *real* one at the bottom. You can put on any one you like, and wear it, and deceive people—deceive *yourself*, even—but sooner or later you'll find yourself out—and then—*smash!*"

"'To thine own be true,' eh?" muttered Ammiel.

"That's it, exactly. Her idea is that we've got to be what we *are*—or we can't possibly be happy. And she's right—by George, she is! I'm not a business man and never was. I'm a painter—a pretty bum one, yet." He smiled ruefully. "But I've had more fun painting bum pictures than



Adrienne came down presently. . . . "Put on your hat," he ordered abruptly. "I can't talk to you here."

I'd ever get out of building up the biggest business in the world. And so—"

"You're going to be a painter?"

Jonas nodded. "I may never amount to shucks," he said with serene conviction. "And that doesn't matter in the least. Life's a funny thing, Ammiel; nobody, I guess, understands it. All we can do is to take it as it comes, and get all the fun out of it we can."

Ammiel raised his eyes to his grandfather's portrait. "What do you suppose grandfather would say to this notion of yours?"

Jonas hung his head. "He'd call me all kinds of a damn fool, of course. Grandfather was a business man—every inch of him. He couldn't understand anything else."

To Ammiel came the quaint fancy that the lips of the portrait moved in the ghost of a smile—as was proper in the portrait of a man who had long been a ghost. He answered with a little smile of his own.

"WHAT are you grinning at?" demanded Jonas with a touch of asperity.

"I suppose," murmured Ammiel, still looking at the portrait, "you can balance yourself on a tight-rope with a paint brush as well as anything else." Then his voice changed. "Well, what are your plans?"

"I've put the house on the market. Going to clean up everything."

"And then?"

"We're going abroad. Jean wants to. It seems best."

Ammiel pursed his lips. "And how about—this?" His gesture swept the dingy office.

"It's yours," said Jonas comfortably. "I'll give you proxies for my stock. My salary, of course, will cease. I shall be all through."

"When?"

"As soon as I can wind things up. A week or two, may be."

"You won't have much to live on," muttered Ammiel, frowning.

"It isn't what you have," replied Jonas serenely. "It's what you can buy with what you have. There isn't enough money in the world, dear boy, to make me sit in that chair of yours again!"

Ammiel was silent, his fingers running through his hair. "And suppose," he said presently. "I, too, should refuse to sit in it?"

Jonas showed no concern. "That's your privilege. But if there's anything else—anything you want to do—take the advice of a man who's learned the lesson—and do it!"

"I have not changed," said Ammiel quietly. "There is nothing I want to do. Nothing. And I can do—anything." In a colorless monotone he told of his fortune—omitting only the communication from his grandfather. That, for no particular reason, he kept secret.

"You don't mean it! Gosh—and you're better off than any of us! Well, well!" If there was a momentary flicker of envy in Jonas's eyes, it was quickly extinguished. "I'll be borrowing from you," he laughed.

"It's all yours if you want it," said Ammiel dully. "What can I do with it?"

"Anything you like—anything you want."

"And I want nothing." The corners of Ammiel's mouth twitched. "What a droll situation! You chucking the business—and I chucking it too, if I want to!"

"Do you want to?"

Ammiel laughed outright. "That's a hard question. A month ago I could have answered it—offhand. Now—I'm not so sure. I—I'd rather not even discuss it."

Even to Jonas, not the most intuitive of men, it was clear that a change of topic was advisable. "Well, what's the news of the family. How's everybody?"

"Nothing new. You got my letter about Sal?"

"No. What about her?"

"Oh, nothing much. Only it's all off between her and Destine."

"Off? The engagement's broken?"

"Just so. It began to crack when mother gave up the house. She and Sarah live well enough, of course—but there isn't that atmosphere of ease and opulence that used to hang over the roof of the Spottswoods. Destine's a sensitive fellow. He tumbled immediately. He picked up his tent and stole away—to New York, I believe."

"Poor Sal!" said Jones sympathetically.

Ammiel's smile was ironic. "All's well that ends well. In her reaction from her grief—losing that 'interesting' life she's always talking about—and not seeing people who do arty things in hammered copper—she's bounced into the arms of the most uninteresting young man in the world—John Currier, an old flame."

"Poor Sal!" said Jonas again.

"She bears up well. She's letting her hair grow, and she's quit cigarettes, and she goes to church every Sunday with John, and—remember what you said a little while ago about actors and costumes? Well, Sarah, being literary and all that, was on the stage. She's really the most domestic of creatures. She and John will lead the dullest life imaginable—and be ridiculously contented. I know them both."

Jonas rose. "Well, I must run over and have a chat with Steve. Isn't it great—his being elected! And such a majority!"

"Wonderful," agreed Ammiel. "Following in grandfather's footsteps. Perhaps, some day, he'll be President."

"Not impossible. Good old Steve! He did what he wanted to. Always wanted to be a lawyer. Never had a distracting thought in his life. Lucky devil!"

"Very," said Ammiel again, as he followed his brother out of the office. "As you so truthfully say, distractions are—dangerous. Well—so long. See you tomorrow. You're booked for dinner at the house."

Returned to his desk, he went lackadaisically to work, reading his letters and answering them, making decisions, interviewing callers, holding endless conversations on the telephone, in short, occupying himself with 'business.' But he was like a somnambulist, not conscious of what he did or said.

So passed the afternoon. About four o'clock his secretary came in. "There's a lady to see you—but she wouldn't say what for."

"If she had it probably wouldn't have been true," answered Ammiel with a weary sigh. "Ladies are that way. Show her in."

IT WAS growing dark, and he did not recognize his visitor until she spoke. Then he sprang up, offering her his hand. "Elsie Collins! For goodness' sake—what brings you way over here?"

She took the chair he indicated. "Don't worry. No bad news this time. I—just dropped in to—well—say good-by."

"Good-by? You're going away?"

She nodded. "A long way, too. South America. Look—I've been practicing the fandango!" She rose and did a step or two, snapping her fingers. "How's that, eh? La-la, la—la, la, la! Knock 'em dead."

"I hope you do well," said Ammiel politely. "What sort of a show is it?"

She showed her teeth in a smile. "A new sort—for me. And a brand-new part."

"Dancing?"

She shook her head. "No. I'm cast for the wife. It'll be hard, too. But the manager says I've got to play it. And he's a stern, strong man, believe me." She chuckled. "It took a lot of work to make him marry me."

"Are you married?"

She held out her hand. "There's the ring."

"Well—did you get your millionaire?"

"Not so's you could notice it! My man's got nothing but a job—and not much of one, either. But he's a man—and he's mine. So I should worry about the millions."

"I—I'm very glad," murmured Ammiel. "I congratulate you—and him."

"Thanks." She looked at him for a moment, her eyes shining. Then, as if in embarrassment, they fell. "You—you'll be surprised when I tell you who it is. It—it's Clem."

"*Clem?* Clem Thorsen?"

She nodded. "Funny, isn't it? He don't love me, I guess. And if I really an' truly loved him I don't guess I'd marry him. He ought to do better than me. But here we are—all tied up and bound for South America. He's got a railroad job there. It looks pretty good."

"I—I'm utterly amazed!" exclaimed Ammiel honestly.

"Sure. I knew you would be. But it isn't so queer, after all. I took a shine to Clem the minute I saw him. I sat up there in my room, blubbering like a fool. 'You're out of your head, Elsie, old thing,' I says."

"I know what you're thinking," said Elsie hastily. "How could he be so crazy about that girl of yours, and fall for me? That's what you're wondering. Well—maybe you'll think it's funny—but I'm still daffy over the fellow that put me to the bad. I'll never care about anybody that way again. And Clem's crazy about that girl. But he can't have her—an' it wouldn't be so good, maybe, if he could. There's a good many things in the way. Well, there you are. He's lonesome and

I'm lonesome. Both of us want a new deal. If we went it alone, he'd hit the hops again, sure as fate, an' I'd keep on my way to where I had my ticket. If we tied up, we might do the same thing—but there was a chance. Get me?"

"I think so," said Ammiel, a little uncertainly.

With a nervous gesture she brushed the tears from her eyes. "I—I got to go now. Good-by. First thing you know I'll be doing a sob scene." She forced a laugh. "This part's new to me."

"You've put it over," he said. "I envy you."

She wheeled sharply. "You envy me?" Comprehension flashed in her eyes. "Oh, I see! You haven't got her?"

He shook his head. "And not going to."

"Not going to?" She stared at him. "Quitting?" She ripped out the word like an oath.

He bowed his head. "Something like that."

"Why? Another man?"

"Yes."

She hesitated, with her hand on the doorknob. Then she came back to his side. "Snap out of it, sonny," she ordered. "You haven't half tried. If I could nab Clem, when there wasn't anything in God's world he wanted so little as me, why—" She paused, her implication clear. "She hasn't married the other bird yet, has she?"

"No. Not yet."

"Well, then—a man's never down till he's out, as the Salvation Army says. As long as the girl's single, you've still got a chance, haven't you?"

"I suppose so," admitted Ammiel dully.

Elsie continued to stare at him. Then, with a little sigh, she shrugged her shoulders. "I can't do your fighting for you, old fellow. Wisht I could. But if you want her, you'll get her. Remember, *I* got Clem. Wantin' anything a lot is half the battle."

"It is, I think, nearly all of it," answered Ammiel.

She squeezed his hand. "Good luck, kid! I'm betting on you." Then, with a choking "Goo'by," she fled precipitately.

He went back to his desk and sat down. Thus, solitary, he would sit till the end of his days.

Elsie was right. Loneliness was the most dreadful of fates.

TO SOPHIA SPOTTSWOOD, looking around at her children and their wives, and at Sarah and John Currier, oblivious to all but their own concerns as was proper with young lovers, it was a happy moment.

"Of course," she said aloud, "it would be more perfect if dear Casper and Hester were with us too. But they are so happy in their new work. Dear children—so happy!"

She beamed, peering at them with eyes which no longer saw very well, and so, perhaps, saw more pleasantly—which is the compensation for the weight of years. "And you, Jonas—you'll soon be abroad, too."

"As soon as possible," said her eldest, heartily.

"Of course I don't quite understand it," she confessed plaintively. "What will you ever do over there, Jonas dear?"

"Why, sketch and paint—"

"Yes—but couldn't you do that here?"

"There's the atmosphere, too, you know," supplied Jean; "and the great paintings he wants to study."

Mrs. Spottswood shook her head. "You know best, no doubt, my dears. But it does seem so far away when we might all be so happy together."

"There's a practical side to it, mother," laughed Jonas. "Living is so much cheaper over there."

"I dare say," agreed Sophia. "Though why, when you were so nicely established and doing so well, you should throw away everything—" She sighed, though with no great regret. All was for the best in this best of all possible worlds, and though her firstborn might puzzle her, she was, after all, growing a trifle old, and it was possible that he knew best. Jonas, unlike Ammiel, had never given her a particle of trouble.

She turned to the latter. "You are so silent, Ammiel. Don't you feel well, dear?"

"Never felt better, mother."

"But why are you so silent?"

"Oh, let him alone, mother!" said Stephen, coming to the rescue. "By the way, Ammie, a friend of mine—an architect—told me yesterday that that chap you roomed with in college—what's his name?"

"Padgett?"

"Yes. Seems he's just won some sort of prize—quite a big one. He—"

"Didn't he marry an old flame of your—Phyllis Jerrold?" asked Cecily. "Seems to me—"

Mrs. Spottswood gave her daughter-in-law a warning glance. "Poor Ammiel! That was a very unhappy time for all of us. I don't think I shall ever quite forgive that girl!" Then, as if that were an unchristian and unworthy thought, she changed the subject. "When do you go to Washington, Stephen, dear?"

"Wednesday. Everything's packed."

"How wonderful," murmured Sophia, raising her eyes to the portrait of Stephen's grandfather, "to have a Spottswood again in the public eye! I think we should all be very proud."

"Very proud," they chorused dutifully.

"And happy, too," she added.

"I am happy," said Cecily.

"And I," echoed Jean.

"I shouldn't say the little parrakeets looked exactly miserable," chuckled Jonas, with a nod toward Sarah and John Currier, who sat, oblivious to the world, in a far corner.

Mrs. Spottswood smiled contentedly at her youngest daughter—soon to be securely at anchor in the still harbor of matrimony. Sarah's inexplicable attachment for Mr. Destine was something which had always troubled her. It could now be forgotten. And so, with a little sigh, she forthwith forgot it.

SHE looked again from one to another of her children: at Jonas, that stanch and dependable rock; and at Stephen, more brilliant, more charming, a little less stable. Curious, was it not, that the solid one should be showing signs of movement, and that the one more mercuric should be settling in security. But Jonas's whim—from the first she had heard of it she had never considered it as other than a whim—represented, she was confident, no more than a step in the slow process of crystallization. He would have his fling at painting, or whatever it was that amused him, and take no harm from it. But in due course he would return to take his place at the office, where the eldest of the Spottswoods should always be. This phase was but the creaking of timbers in a new building, a presage to ultimate repose.

Her dimmed eyes came to rest at last upon Ammiel—kindly, generous, gentle-hearted soul, who had troubled her without surcease, since the day of his birth. She had never understood what went on behind those enigmatic eyes of his, and she recognized, suddenly, that she never would. He was so like his grandfather, that mysterious, rather awesome old man, in manner, in appearance, in, she dimly suspected, mentality. He had the latter's charm, his elusiveness, his whimsicality. Everything was in the young man save the something—whatever it was—which had made of the elder's life a close-packed record of achievement and distinction.

Earlier in the afternoon, before his departure on a call, she had asked Dr. Taplow to explain, since he had known both Ammiels, what it was that the younger lacked. And he had replied, with an expressive grunt: "Time."

The gruff old physician, she knew, had a faith—had always had it—in this child of hers. But he could not—or would not—explain it. "An unlighted lamp, Sophia," he had said in his cryptic way, "offers no affront to darkness. But if there be oil and the wick trimmed—"

He had left her to complete the sentence for herself. Helplessly, she looked at her youngest son. He, alone of all the company, had not expressed himself as happy. She wondered, indeed, if he had heard the cheerful talk of the others at all. He sat now, his chin in his hands, elbows on his knees, staring at a pattern in the rug. Even his extraordinary fortune in the bequest of his grandfather had not roused him. Her mind flitted back into the dim past for a forgotten phrase of his schoolmaster: "I can't rouse the boy. I doubt if any one can."

The years, she reflected sadly, had made of that doubt a certainty. There he sat, unseeing, unhearing, a vaguely wistful sadness in his face, as if he knew that the content which was the portion of the others could never be his.

She was not altogether correct in these assumptions. He had seen and heard more than he wanted to. He was sad—unutterably so. But he was not envious or bitter—he was past that. If Stephen could get happiness out of strutting in the circus of politics, and Jonas out of puttering with his paints, Sarah out of her passion for the literal, humorless Currier, that, indeed, was their fortune. And if his mother could be happy, seeing her children happy, that was the great reward for the trials and tedium of motherhood.

He, too, felt something of that. He was glad that they were happy—or thought they were. But he felt intolerably alone. Suddenly the contentment of the room, as tangible as the odor from Stephen's cigar, became more than he could endure. He sprang to his feet.

"Ammiel!" His mother looked alarmed. "What *is* the matter?"

He dismissed his frown and smiled with a seeming ease. "Just remembered a date," he explained.

"Ho!" boomed Jonas. "A girl, eh?"

"Sly rascal!" chuckled Stephen, his arm around Cecily. "Well, it's high time you're joining us, young fellow."

Ammiel shook his head. "It isn't a girl. just a little matter of business. Sorry—I've got to run." He kissed his mother, nodded inclusively to the others, and went out. A whistle of apparent unconcern was on his lips.

"He worries me," sighed his mother, when the door had closed behind him. "I don't know what to make of him, lately."

"Oh, he'll be all right," Stephen assured her comfortably. "He'll marry somebody, and—"

Jonas's nod was judicious. "He's gotten to be a first-rate business man," he rumbled. "First rate!"

Sarah emerged from her absorption in Currier long enough to observe, with the manner of one stating an incontrovertible fact: "He hasn't any ambition—that's the trouble with him. Isn't it, John?"

"I—er—I'm afraid so," agreed Currier obediently.

"He's a good boy," murmured Mrs. Spottswood sorrowfully. "Such a good boy! And you've all been so good to him—especially you boys."

Stephen stared at his cigar, and Jonas coughed. Neither said anything for a moment. And on both faces was a definite expression of relief when Cecily turned to Sarah with some technical question regarding her trousseau.

The women, like globules of mercury, coalesced.

The men looked at one another, puffed at their cigars, and were at peace.

IN THE street, Ammiel stood undecided. Suddenly, like a dog at the point, he stiffened. From away to the south came the wail of a siren, and from the near-by boulevard, rising to a sharp crescendo as it passed the cross street, and diminishing quickly in the distance, came the fierce clang of bells.

He hesitated no longer. With the brisk certainty of a man with a destination and a purpose, he set off southward.

Arrived at the dreary, graystone front of Adrienne's boarding-house, he hesitated again—but only for an instant. With set lips he went up the steps and rang the bell.

"I dunno," said the colored girl doubtfully. "She's busy packin' up. She's a-goin' away."

"Away?" Ammiel made no secret of his consternation.

The girl nodded. "She's checkin' out this afternoon. She—"

"Tell her I'm here," snapped Ammiel.

The wait in the dingy parlor, with its vague odor of pickles and cedar oil and soot, was interminable. He began to wonder if it was to be a wait in vain. In that event, he decided, a frontal assault above stairs would be necessary.

But Adrienne came down presently, smoothing her dress and trying to push back her straying hair. "This is a surprise," was her cool greeting as she took his hand.

He made no attempt to answer her unspoken question. For a moment he could only stare at her face, overcome by a kind of intoxication. She was pale—much paler than usual—and there were shadows under her black eyes. "Put on your hat," he ordered abruptly. "I can't talk to you here."

She shook her head. "I can't. Not—not today."

"The maid said you were packing. What for?"

She hesitated, a furtive look coming into her eyes as they dropped before his and sought the door. "I'm going away."

"Away? Where to?"

"That doesn't really matter," she answered. "I'm going away. That's all."

"But it matters enormously," he declared, a little angrily. "Don't be ridiculous! Where are you going? And why? And—"

She rose. "I'm sorry, Ammiel. I should love to chat with you. But really—I'm awfully busy. I—"

With a spring, he put himself between her and the doorway. "Now then—tell me: What's the mystery? You look like a ghost, and talk like—like—what do you talk like, Adrienne?"

She hung her head momentarily. When she raised it there was a kind of fear in her eyes. "Please, Ammiel. I'm late as it is. Really—"

"I don't give a hang how late you are. Something's wrong, and you're not telling me. What's up? Last time I saw you, you were as gay as a lark—going to marry Baxter, and—"

"I'm not going to marry him," she whispered.

Ammiel recoiled. "You—you're not? You—of course you aren't!" he cried joyously. "You're going to marry me. You're—"

The corners of her mouth twitched in a wistful little smile. "I'm going away, Ammiel," she said dully. "It's all quite settled."

"But, my dear child—"

"I'm not a child. I'm old—old as the pyramids, lad. And I'm going away. I—"

He reached for her and put his arm around her. "If you say that again you'll begin to believe it."

"Ammiel!" She struggled ineffectually. "Don't do this. Truly—"

"Afraid the boarders will see?" he jeered. "Then put on your hat and we'll go to the privacy of the park."

"No!" She finally freed herself, and put a chair between them. "I told you I was going away," she said fiercely. "I am. You will never see me again."

"I'll follow you!"

Her strength seemed suddenly to leave her, and she sank into a chair, her face in her hands. "Oh, Ammiel! Please don't make it any harder for me. It's hard enough!"

"LOOK here!" At a bound he was beside her, and he raised her anguished face to his. "What's it all about? Why aren't you going to marry Baxter?"

"Because I don't love him."

"Well then—why aren't you going to marry me?"

"Because—because—" Her eyes fluttered and sank before the fierce interrogation in his. "Because—I do!"

His hands dropped to his sides. "I—I'm jiggered!" he muttered helplessly.

She wiped away the tears which had gathered in her eyes, and her voice grew hard. "If you'd had nothing, I think I'd have married you long ago."

A twinkle deepened in his eyes. "You certainly have clung to that idea of my wealth, haven't you!"

For a long time she was silent, lost in thoughts that he could not fathom. Finally she looked up, and her voice was again under control. "I love you, Ammiel," she said evenly, "—with my whole heart and my whole soul; you and none other. I always have. And I do not think I shall ever love another man in the same way."

"Well then?"

She checked him with a gesture. "But I am afraid—oh, how one can fear oneself! I have seen the depths to which I am capable of sinking—and it is no lovely spectacle. The moment I made up my mind to marry you, because you were a Spottswood, and because—"

"See here, little idiot!" He took her wrists in his fingers. "I'm no more a Spottswood than the man in the next block. I've just left the Spottswoods—I'm the cross they have to bear."

"And because you had the wealth I thought I craved," she went on, unheeding him. "In that moment I knew I could not marry you. The love I had for you was the one thing I should never mar. Life might turn to ashes in my hands, but that one precious light should never die."

Ammiel felt his throat tighten, but he managed a laugh. "Me—wealthy? Bless your dear heart—all that time I was poorer than you. I didn't draw as much from Bremling-Spottswood as you got from selling hats."

"But the money you put into the superheater," she began incredulously.

"It was all I had," he answered. "Why, in those days—"

"In those days? It's not so long ago."

"No. But the wheel turns suddenly, sometimes. I—why, I can compete with Baxter, now! Coach and four—anything you like." Succinctly, he told her of his grandfather's bequest.

Her long lashes curtained her eyes, and her lips drooped in a sort of disappointment. "So—you're what I thought you were, after all! Oh, Ammiel, I think, if you were poor and friendless and—"

"Listen!" Sudden passion surged in his

veins, and his voice was vibrant with a new determination. "I'm utterly alone—and poor, in all the things that count. And I shall surely die unless you save me."

She struggled in his arms, fighting against his kisses. "I won't marry you—I won't—I won't!" she wailed.

"You'll do what I tell you," he answered through his teeth, as he crushed her to him. "You will! You—it's the first time I've ever wanted anything in all my life. And I'm going to get it. D'you understand?" Roughly, he put his hand over her mouth, smothering her protests. "I'm alive, now. Rich or poor, bad or good—it doesn't matter. Nothing matters—except that you're going to stay with me. . . . Listen!" On the river, a fire boat was whistling in short, peremptory blasts. "With me—until the fire's out. Understand?"

There was a discreet cough from the hallway, and the colored maid stood hesitant and embarrassed. "The taxi's here, missie."

"Tell him the call's canceled," answered Ammiel promptly. "Here! Give him this—and tell him to chase himself." Still the maid hesitated.

"You don't want it, ma'am?" she said doubtfully.

There was a moment of silence—to Ammiel, an eternity. And then Adrienne, leaning against the mantel, her face averted, slowly shook her head.

The girl turned to go. But Ammiel checked her. "Wait! I've changed my mind. We'll want him after all."

Adrienne looked up, bewilderment in her eyes, to find an exultant gleam in his. "You should have got your hat when I told you to," he said. "Get it now."

"But, Ammiel—"

"You can't get married without a hat," he said firmly. "Not to a Spottswood." And when she still tarried, he took her arms and gently propelled her toward the doorway. "The taxi's waiting," he whispered to her as she went up the stairs. "And the preacher—and a most beautiful life beyond!"

SHE returned to that phrase an hour or so later. "A beautiful life," she said thoughtfully, "—mine and yours."

"Ours," he corrected her. "That ring," he observed, pointing to the golden band on her finger, "you will note, is symbolic. And the chap who sold it to me insisted it was solid. That means something, my dear."

"A beautiful life," she said again. "Ours. Yes, I like the sound of that. But what will you do?"

"Oh, don't!" he groaned. "That sounds too much like the family. Always doing something."

"But that's what life is," she said gravely. "Doing."

He nodded to the Pullman porter and obtained more pillows for her back. "I suppose it is," he agreed. "Well—we can do anything. Go abroad—go anywhere."

"When?"

"Right away, if you like. Spend a week at the Springs—and then—on the wings of the morning . . ."

"To the uttermost parts of the world," she finished. Her eyes closed. "Tell me, dear heart—but don't tell me right away, because it's an important question: now that you have me, is there anything else you want?"

"No," he said quickly.

"Are you—quite sure?"

He stared out at the green rippling by the car window. It was odd. She had phrased a question that was asking itself in his own mind.

"Do you know," he said irrelevantly, "Bremling-Spottswoods' going to declare a little dividend next month—and it'll be the first rational one since grandfather quit!" His voice shook a little.

Her eyes still closed, she reached for his hand. "We'll play a little, dear, but we'll work a great deal, I think. A beautiful life!"

"It doesn't matter, of course," he mused. "Doesn't matter at all. But—funny, isn't it?—I *would* like to put that business on its feet!"

She opend her eyes, smiling at him. "Careful! Ambition will get you if you don't watch out. And I may—have to be proud of you. Do you want that?"

"I guess," he answered thoughtfully, "that's what I do want."

THE END

Publisher's Announcement

In Which We Describe Some Plans for the Future

THERE will be a marked change in *Everybody's* with the next issue.

There are stories and stories—stories in fiction and stories in fact. *Everybody's* has given you fiction. It will continue to give you fiction and will add stories in fact that are equally interesting, colorful, dramatic or entertaining.

Driving every movement forward is a personality—some man or woman with vision and purpose, some one who is achieving greatness by realizing a dream, with results that affect the convenience, security or happiness of all. Scientists, inventors, artists, explorers, captains of industry are making progress at so swift a pace that while marveling at their results we lose sight of true stories of heroic achievement, moving sentiment and thrilling adventure. Oftentimes our loss is a big one, for many of the significant developments going on about us disclose precious nuggets of truth or discovery or inspiration that can be applied with profit to our own living.

Even now, somewhere, a ship is leaving port; a scientist is analyzing the contents of a test tube; a laborer is digging the first shovelful of earth from the site of a buried civilization; an inventor is completing the model of a device that may revolutionize our present conception of time or space or distance. And with each is beginning the story of some change that will eventually affect our lives just as surely as have the telephone, the electric light and the radio.

In even the most obscure communities there are fascinating stories of people who have made a goal of some idea and then set out to attain it—people who have overcome handicaps of poverty, environment, bad health, lack of educational opportunities and all the other barriers commonly considered fatal to success. There are changing conditions that will make some of our picturesque institutions and customs antiquated within the time of the generation now living. Changes now in the making, too, will affect our business and professional opportunities, the upbringing of our children, our family and social relations, and the interests that center about our conception of home. All these changes involve stories that are more interesting for the light they throw on our own individual problems.

Outside of fiction there is adventure, romance, high heroism and gallant action on view all about us. To find these values in people and events, and to extract from them whatever there is of cheer and inspiration to lighten the load of the rest of us, will be an important function of *Everybody's*.

In a very real sense it will be a magazine edited by its readers, for next door to you are people who are doing unusual things while the world, unheeding, passes them by. We want to find such people and get their stories—and to that end your suggestions, ideas and criticism will be welcomed.

Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

"THE Recluse of Fifth Avenue" (page 71), itself an absorbing piece of metropolitan adventure, is made even more rousing when one learns of Wyndham Martyn's method of writing. It is a long jump from the Mojave Desert to Fifth Avenue, and yet he does it with a seven-league pen. Incidentally, his letter for this month sets forth the other side of the argument of those who claim to do their best work when writing "on location."

> I write most of my stories [he says] in the Mojave Desert, that desolate and windswept plateau almost four thousand feet above sea level. There I have changed a tire with the temperature at 130° F., and there I have set by a fire because outside it was freezing. There is a tradition that this barren land was once well-watered, fruitful and lovely and that, buried under its sands is the great dead city of the Mojave. Owing to the evil ways of the dwellers in the then fecund land, a great wind swept the mountains bare of trees and buried all living things so that all now is waste and sage brush, cactus and Joshua trees. Only the fierce and tenacious of life can live there. It is too hard a life for fox or bear. Coyotes, jack rabbits, a few wolves and mountain lions prowl. These first two live without water. The latter come down from the mountains to hunt, and when the barking coyotes hear the wolf's cry they grow dumb.
>
> Among these odd surroundings I do a lot of writing. Why? I suppose because the desert has a hold on one who formerly has prospected in it for gold and has ridden over it as a cowpuncher. It is a hard, bad country. Irrigation is taming it now. On the Mojave the Bartlett pears do admirably. Little ranches are pushing out all of the time. In the end the Mojave will be conquered. But I hope it won't be in my time.

FEW are better qualified to write of the Northwest than Blanche Brace ("The Pink Dress," page 134) who is descended, she tells us, from those who pushed the borders of civilization westward to the Pacific and later carried it into Western Canada and Alaska.

> My grandmother [she writes] was a baby when my great-grandparents trekked over the covered wagon trail back in 1847. Later she had the experience that I refer to in "The Pink Dress" of remaining on her homestead claim during an Indian uprising in Washington Territory when nearly every one else fled for protection to the nearest town.
>
> Once my mother, given ten dollars for a birthday present, picked out a lot in what was yet a paper city, but on her way to buy it, fell for a hat with a big, red rose—a hundred thousand dollar hat, it turned out, for the lot she didn't buy is now the most central square on the main street of Spokane. My father was one of the first in the Yukon gold rush—the second great gold rush that my family managed to get through without making any money. But they helped make something more interesting: the commonplace, everyday history of a great new land.

ROLAND PERTWEE ("A Life Policy," page 9) is not only a successful teller of tales but is quite well known on the English stage and paints more than acceptably. He has had two novels and numerous short stories and plays published variously. He has pretty well covered the globe although his real home is in London.

WITH an ancestry running back to Norway and the sea Albert Richard Wetjen ("The Heart of Macloughlin," page 55) comes honestly by his love of adventure. Knocking about the world, together with some information picked up in public libraries, has given him his equipment for writing—first-hand information that is apparent in the zest and meaty quality of his stories. Speaking of his work Wetjen says:

> The essence of story telling goes back to the naked bard before the leaping fire at night. He had to hold his savage audience with action and plot and not with style and finish of performanec. Style is a

Roland Pertwee ("A Life Policy," page 9) has something to say about the humorous side of married life.

Wyndham Martyn ("The Recluse of Fifth Avenue," page 71) goes into the Mojave Desert to write about Manhattan.

later achievement of higher civilization. That which is ingrained deeper in humanity is action, plot and theme. Of course, the story that combines literary style, theme and plot, all strong and well-told, is the masterpiece.

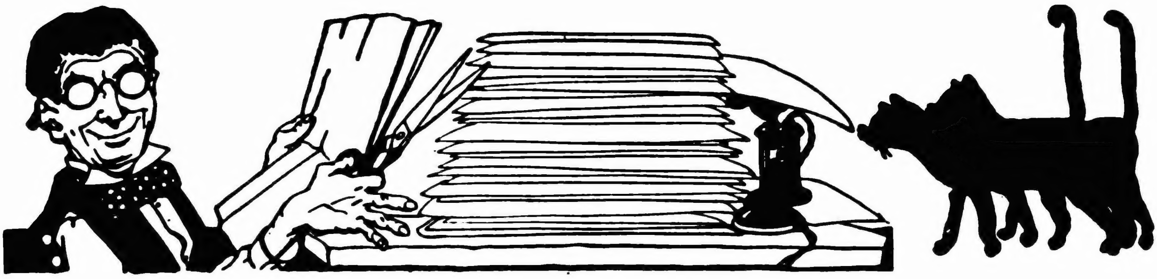
IN A recent editorial *The Lariat* says of him:

> No young writer ever crowded so much into a few years as he did in seeing the hard, hard world, and then realizing the need of seeing still more of it. He saw it young when moments became lasting impressions. He tramped and beat his way from Cape Town to Kingston, Jamaica. He landed in Montreal, July, 1920, working passage from London where he spent a few months struggling to exist. He wrote his first story in Montreal and sold it for ten dollars. Again to the road, dreaming, fighting, working, until the winter of 1920.

In Vancouver he rented a garret and started writing in earnest. Through the hard winter he dieted and froze. But during that time he bought his first typewriter —and it lived up to its price. But the hard days were not yet over. It was not until later, having walked to Harrisburg, Oregon, that he got a job, was allowed to sleep in the town jail until he could get on his feet, and went to work in the hop fields. A year later, after slaving alternately in the fields and over his typewriter (it was another machine bought on the instalment plan) he sent a poem to a newspaper of the west coast. It was the first indication of the success that was ultimately to follow, although some time elapsed before he pried his way between the covers of a magazine. This, very briefly, has been the preliminary career of Wetjen. Yes, he ought to have material. We're inclined to agree that he has!

TEXAS has sent this tribute from "one who knows" regarding Mr. Olmsted's unusual stories, one of which, "Homer Hunterfield," appears on page 62. He writes:

> I have often thought of complimenting you for getting out such a good story magazine, but as often neglected to do so, till now yours is the only magazine I take. I have large cotton-farming interests that keep me busy, but sometimes I get started on one of your stories and it seems I can't stop till I finish it. But the two most interesting stories of the last few months I have read, was "Mountain Farmers" and "Granny Hooper" by Stanley Olmsted, and I am anxious to see his next one. I have been a commercial salesman and traveled the mountain country a great deal from western Pennsylvania to Alabama. They are mostly Scotch-Irish and have more good dry wit and humor than any people I have ever been among.



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In Hollywood, Calif.: "*Dr. Gum, Dentist.*" (MISS J. H.)
Fulton St., Brooklyn: "*The Church Almighty Missionary Bakery and Lunch Room.*" (MISS G. E. H.)
In Baltimore: "*Knell, Undertaker.*" "*George Cook, Lunch Room*" "*Peltz, Furrier.*" "*Jones & Lamb, Butchers.*" "*Sacks, Tailor.*" (MISS G. E. H.)
Nixon's Apollo Theater, Atlantic City: "*Harold Manypenny, Treasurer.*" (E. J. N.)
In Indianapolis: "*Electrical Treatments, Ida May Hirt.*" (A. A. H.)
At 475 Sutter St., San Francisco: "*Thunder & Dangers.*" (MRS. J. M. S.)

(*Crum Elbow, N. Y.*)

Asa Lyons met with an accident while unloading a log saw engine last Saturday. His son, Clarence, who was helping him, let his end down so quickly it tripped his father throwing him backwards—the back of his head striking on a log. The doctor was called and said it was a slight brain concussion.

"Slight br-r——," why I'd sue that doctor for slander.

(*Crum Elbow, N. Y.*)

Mr. Swimmer, who has purchased the Spelman place, was there last Sunday looking over the grounds.

Hang your clothes on a hickory limb, but don't go near the water.

(*Eddie Cantor, in Manufacturers' Trust Co. Adv't*)

"I have four children . . . God bless them . . . and while I should have thought of it myself, I am thankful to say that the suggestion came to me from one of the officers of the company."

As Hamlet whispered to Portia, as they sat enjoying the "Follies," "It's an ill 'wind' that blows nobody any good."

(*Adv. of Brillo M'f'g. Co.*)

OUR GUARANTEE.

We will give absolutely free a new aluminum utensil for any old one Brillo fails to clean. Over sixty million packages of Brillo have been sold, but no purchaser has ever received a new utensil under the terms of this guarantee.

There's real candor for you.

(*Upper Red Hook*)

Milton Best was a caller on Mrs. Jonas Smith on Wednesday. . . . James Wright and Jonas Smith were business callers in Rhinebeck Wednesday. . . .

Watch out, Jonas.

(*Elizaville, N. Y.*)

Mrs. William Duntz has been entertaining her brother from the East recently.

What an entertaining time he muster had.

(*Powell Ford, N. Y.*)

There are impassable places in our roads and with this snow they are likely to be worse.

The pessimist.

(*Billed at a local hall, Pelham, N. Y.*)

"Coming: Water, The Famous Magician!"

Wonderful! Watch him change a dirty-faced urchin into a "mummer's pet" in a few seconds.

(*Elton Democrat*)

Fire of an unknown origin totally destroyed the contents of Clarence A. Corbin one night last week. (W. M. M.)

I wonder who he bought it of.

(*Arkansas Democrat*)

"Girl's Bathing Suits ½ Off."

How long since they *added* the other ⅝ths?

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(Eastford, Conn.)

The minister said at Mr. Bosworth's funeral several years ago that there was as much displeasure as pleasure in this life.

At the funeral of Mrs. Perkins, **who was a century old, many years ago, a grandparent of Mrs. Bowen's,** the minister, Mr. Gray, remarked that the pulling of the first shingle nail meant that the roof would finally go. This was over thirty years ago and it is proving true.

Hammer away at it yourselves, dear readers, and see what *you* can make out of it.

(Literary Digest)

"A Hen That Turned Into A Rooster."

You can *keep* your crowing hens, but, give *me* a few laying roosters.

(Schnectady Gazette)

NOTICE.

Will the married lady that accompanied my husband Saturday night, to the White Swan and other drinking places and left her pocketbook with 36 cents and wedding ring with initials C. E. W. to E. M. A. on the back seat of my husband's car please write to Box 32-X, Gazette and receive ring.

(W. K. L.)

Oh, the mean thing, she's kept the 36 cents!

(Limelight, Follett, Tex.)

Mr. Tony Whitacre of Booker was invited in wedlock to Miss Ella Cook of Booker on Wednesday morning, Jan. 23, 1925. They were married at Guymon Okla.

The perils of leap year.

(Adv. of Perfection Motorcar Heater)

"You can't see the Quality."

I tried to, but gave it up long ago.

"Everyday Uses of English"
by
Maurice H. Weseen, A. M.

Gee, and I've always thought wesawn was correct!

SAYS HE SLEW WIFE IN ITALY 14 YEARS AGO.

"How did you kill her?" Judge Bleakley asked.

"I shot her five times," the prisoner replied.

"Why did you do it?"

"Because she's no friend of mine."

'Sfair enuff.

(Rock City, N. Y.)

Stewart Pink is on the sick list.

Not exactly in the pink of perfection.

(Nashville Banner)

KETCHUM—PIG.

COLUMBIA, TENN., Jan. 31—Mrs. J. A. Ketchum announces the engagement and approaching marriage of her daughter, Clara, to Henry Dan Pigg.

Couldn't that announcement have been penned just a bit differently?

(Follett Limelight)

Snow and wind was so terrible at times that one could not see five yards ahead.

Clear as noonday behind.

(Follett Limelight)

Judges will also be present to award prizes to the persons best masked.

Anything to cover up *some* of the faces that will be there.

(Rock City, N. Y.)

Prof. Murry and A. Gay have returned from their trip to New York over the Christmas holidays.

A gay and murry Christmas was had by all.

(Upper Red Hook)

Charles Bliss is treating his barn with a new roof.

His next treat will be "on the house."

(Utica Daily Press)

TWO MILES from Sylvan Beach on good road—four-room house, half acre ground, twelve miles from city. Good place for chickens or an old couple.

(L. W. S.)

"Chickens?" Never'll get 'em that far from *any* city.

(Caldwell, O., Press)

The violence of the explosion, coming from such a small source was the most surprising thing to us, but it finally developed that it was a small steam engine explosion, the real cause of which has not as yet been determined, though it is the concensus of opinion that the enjines supply of water simply ran out and the explosion came the same as it would in any other steam enjine whos water ran out and the boiler became dry.

Oh, well, that explains it.

(Chicago Tribune)

"The man came to my study," said the Rev. John Funston, "and said that young women in a theatrical performance in the downtown district were nude from the waist line up and with but scanty clothing from the waist line down."

Hew to the waistline, and let the costumes fall where they may.

Everybody's Chestnut Tree

***Editor's Note:** Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.*

"WHAT on earth are you wearing all those clothes for?" asked the neighbor.

"Well," was the reply, "I'm going to paint my barn, and the directions on the paint-can say: 'For best results, put on three coats.'"

FIRST CHORINE: What's eating the prima donna?

Second Ditto: Oh, she got a couple of bouquets tonight.

First: Oh, yes? Why, I'd be tickled to death if I only got one.

Second: Oh, no, not if you paid for three like she did.

"ARE you sure, madam," asked the physician of the invalid's wife, "that your husband has had no lucid intervals since I was here last?"

"I'm certain of it," she replied. "I have given him nothing but what you prescribed."

"WHAT'S this mean?" asked the boss. "Some one just telephoned and said that you were struck by a car and couldn't come to work today."

"Ha! Ha!" returned the clerk. "The joke's on him. I told him to call you up tomorrow."

A DOCTOR was called in to see a negro who was down with influenza.

"What I gwine to git him?" asked the wife.

"Give him whisky," the physician responded.

"How much does it cost?"

When the doctor named the price of good whisky per quart the wife responded:

"I can bury him cheaper dan dat."

A FURRIER was endeavoring to sell a fur coat to a prospective customer.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, "I'll just absolutely guarantee this to be genuine skunk fur and that it will wear for years and years."

"But suppose," said the lady, "I get it wet in the rain. What effect will water have on it? Will it spoil?"

"Ma'am," answered the furrier, "I have just one answer to make to that. Did you ever hear of a skunk carrying an umbrella?"

CHINESE Consul Moy Back Him said at a dinner in Portland:

"It is a great mistake to accuse the Chinese of a lack of wit. A tramp knocked at the kitchen door of a Portland home one day, and a smiling Chinaman appeared.

"'Say, John,' croaked the tramp, 'give me a hand-out, for the love o' Mike, will yer? S'elp me, I'm starvin'.'

"'Like fish?' inquired the Chinaman with a bland smile.

"'Betcha sweet life I like fish,' said the tramp eagerly.

"'Call Fliday,' said the Chinaman, and still smiling blandly, he shut the door."

THE court (as celebrated author is haled in): "What made you think the prisoner was intoxicated, officer?"

Policeman: "Well, 'e was 'avin' a 'eated argyment with his publisher, Yeronner."

Judge: "But that doesn't prove he was intoxicated."

Policeman: "But there wasn't any publisher there, Yeronner."

A YOUNG man of nervous appearance, yet possessing a certain determined air, walked into a very ornate business building, hesitated a moment, and then with the directness of one who is about to take the final step, entered one of the well-appointed offices.

"Is this Mr. Steven's office?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Gerald K. Stevens?"

"Yes."

"Is he in?"

"Yes; would you like to see him?"

"N-n-no. No, thank you! But can you tell me how long he will be here?"

"Why, he should be here at least three hours, but he can see you perfectly well now."

"Thank you just the same, but I think I'll call on his daughter."

A YOUNG Irish curate was preaching his first sermon, and chose for his text the miracle of the loaves and the fishes. He was very nervous and read it:

"And they fed five people with five thousand loaves and five thousand fishes."

Thereat one of the rustic hearers murmured, loud enough to be heard:

"That's no miracle, begorra; I could do that myself."

The curate overheard him, and so on the following Sunday he announced the same text, but he had it right this time:

"And they fed five thousand people with five loaves of bread and a few fishes." He paused a second and then, leaning over the pulpit, said: "Could you do that, Mr. Murphy?"

Murphy replied: "Sure, yer riverence, I could."

"And how could you do it?" asked the priest.

"Sure, yer riverence, I could do it with what was left over from last Sunday."

THE irate customer returned to the photographer with the prints of the pictures he had taken.

"Do I look like this picture?" he stormed, shaking it in the photographer's face. "You've made me look like a monkey! Cock-eyed, and a chin like a bulldog. Do you call that a good likeness?"

"The answer is in the negative," sweetly replied the photographer.

A STRANGER who was rather deaf entered a little Scotch church. He seated himself in a front pew and placed an ear-trumpet on his knee. An elder of the kirk, who had never seen an ear-trumpet, watched him with grave suspicion. When the minister entered, the man lifted the trumpet from his knee, but before he could adjust it he felt a tap on his shoulder and heard the indignant elder saying:

"One toot an' ye're oot."

A CLEVER young lawyer was defending a man accused of housebreaking.

"Your Honor, I submit that my client did not break into the house at all. He found the parlor window open, inserted his arm and removed a few trifling articles. Now, my client's arm is not himself, and I fail to see how you can punish him for an offense committed only by one of his limbs."

"That argument," said the judge, "is very well put. Following it logically, I sentence the defendant's arm to one year's imprisonment. He can accompany it or not, just as he chooses."

The prisoner calmly unscrewed his cork arm and, leaving it on the table, walked out.

A WIDOW who prided herself on her housekeeping recently moved to the city and started a boarding-house. She mopped and dusted and swept from cellar to attic and the house was spotless.

As one of her new boarders came down to breakfast she greeted him cheerfully:

"I hope you slept well last night?"

"No," replied the man, "I didn't rest so very well. I was troubled with insomnia."

The landlady bristled with righteous wrath.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "I'll give you ten dollars for every one of those pesky things you find in my house."

AN OLD Scotchman, David Gordon, was seriously ill, with scant hope of recovery. He had been wheedled into making a will, and his relatives were now gathered about his bedside watching him laboriously sign the document. He got as far as D-A-V-I— then fell back exhausted.

"D, Uncle David," exhorted a nephew.

"Dee!" ejaculated the old Scot feebly, but with indignation. "Dee! I'll dee when I'm ready, ye avaricious wretch!"